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Well-Behaved Women Rarely Make History: Eleanor of Aquitaine's Political Career and Its Significance to Noblewomen

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Eleanor of Aquitaine played an indirect role in the formation of medieval and early modern Europe through her resources, wit, and royal connections. The wealth and land the duchess acquired through her inheritance and marriages gave her the authority to financially support religious institutions and the credibility to administrate. Because of her inheritance, Eleanor was a desirable match for Louis VII and Henry II, giving her the title and benefits of queenship. Between both marriages, Eleanor produced ten children, nine of whom became kings and queens or married into royalty and power. The majority of her descendants married royalty or aristocrats across the entire continent, acknowledging Eleanor as the "Grandmother of Europe." Her female descendants constituted an essential part of court, despite the limitations of women's authority. Eleanor's lifelong political career acted as a guiding compass for other queens to follow. She influenced her descendants and successors to follow her famous example in the practices of intercession, property rights, and queenly role. Despite suppression of public authority, women were still able to shape the landscape of Europe, making Eleanor of Aquitaine a trailblazer who transformed politics for future aristocratic women.

Eleanor of Aquitaine intrigues scholars and the public alike for her wealthy inheritance, political power, and controversial scandals. Uncertain of the real date, historians estimate Eleanor's birth year to be either 1122 or 1124. Around age fifteen, the young girl inherited the prosperous duchy of Aquitaine in southern France after the death of her father, William X. The duchess married Louis VII in 1137, becoming the Queen of France and later giving birth to two daughters. Estranged after the Second Crusade, the couple dissolved their marriage with an annulment, preventing Eleanor from seeing her daughters again. A brief eight weeks later, Eleanor married Henry II, who became king of England in 1154. The tumultuous marriage was cooperative enough to produce eight children - five sons and three daughters. The grown sons became restless for power, and they revolted against their father in 1173 with Eleanor's assistance. After his victory, Henry placed the queen under house arrest for the next sixteen years. Richard the Lionheart released his mother Eleanor from imprisonment in 1189, and she served as England's queen-

regent during King Richard's continental expeditions. After Richard's untimely death, Eleanor labored to secure the right of her son, John, to the English throne. She continued to be a solid foundation of authority in the shaky early years of King John's reign. By her death on April 1, 1204, Eleanor was unquestionably one of the most powerful and influential women who had lived in the twelfth century.

Eleanor's wealth, land, and wit enabled her to be a formidable political figure in Europe. Louis VII and Henry II married Eleanor because her inheritance considerably enlarged and enriched their respective holdings. However, the kings could only oversee Aquitaine with Eleanor by their side, because her title was what gave them authority. Her sons, Richard and John, appointed Eleanor as queen-regent above their own wives. Of Eleanor's ten children, only one son died during childhood; the rest of her children became queens and kings or married into influential families. Her grandchildren and other royal descendants shaped much of Europe's history, including that of England, Denmark, Castile, and Sicily, giving her the well-deserved title of "grandmother of Europe."¹ Eleanor's influential and political presence in Europe had a long-term impact on medieval noblewomen's application of power.

Numerous puzzles and contradictions surround Eleanor of Aquitaine's life, attracting scholarly interest. Twelfth-century men disliked powerful women, and rumors about adultery, incest, rebellion and murder cloaked the historical memory of Eleanor in a "black legend" that continued through the centuries in various writings.² These rumors and legends obscured the significance of Eleanor's political activity for too long. Only recently have some modern historians shone a positive light on the queen, working past the negatively biased interpretations. Some scholars deem her a one-of-a-kind character for the Middle Ages, yet others asserted that myth and legend exaggerated her uniqueness. In either case, her career provides an excellent case study of the power that aristocratic women could hold in the Middle Ages.

¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Eleanor of Aquitaine," accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/182258/Eleanor-of-Aquitaine>.

² Ralph V. Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her "Black Legend," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 52, no. 1 (2008): 18.

Modern scholarship on Eleanor began with Agnes Strickland's series, *Lives of the Queens of England: From the Norman Conquest*. Published in 1902, this series documented the lives of famous English queens, including Eleanor of Aquitaine. Ranking Eleanor among the greatest female rulers, Strickland states that the duchess-queen "atoned for an ill-spent youth by a wise and benevolent old age."³ At first, Strickland writes scathing reviews of Eleanor, calling her "immoral," "childish," "giddy," and "light-headed."⁴ Strickland is more forgiving towards the queen in her elder years, but emphasizes Eleanor's instigation of her sons' rebellion and her resulting imprisonment. Strickland mainly focuses on the mythical rumors and scandals about Eleanor, from the queen dressing as an Amazon to presumably murdering Henry II's mistress, Rosamund. These stories fashion the book more as a romantic novel than historical research, especially since it lacks proper primary sources and footnotes. While Strickland's book does little for historical scholarship on Eleanor, it reveals that rumors and misogyny still dominated the duchess-queen's legacy at the turn of the twentieth century.

Marion Meade's 1977 book, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography*, became a highly influential work for later biographers, focusing on the feminist triumphs rather than the duchess' misdeeds. She argues that Eleanor was a key twelfth-century political figure, though misrepresented by historians who treated the duchess as "an accident among men" or a naughty, shameful woman.⁵ Meade points out that despite the queen's associations with four different kings, the duchess's independent success endures in that she is still called "Eleanor of Aquitaine," and not "of France or England."⁶ Meade supports her argument for Eleanor's unique greatness by sharing relevant stories such as the queen's presence in the Second Crusade and her reigns in three countries. Like Strickland's, Meade's biography reads more as a novel than research, as she speculates about Eleanor's life when evidence simply does not exist, including her

³ Agnes Strickland, "Eleanora of Aquitaine: Queen of Henry II," in *Lives of the Queens of England: From the Norman Conquest*, vol. I, revised edition (Philadelphia: George Barrie & Son, 1902), 299.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵ Marion Meade, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1977), x.

⁶ Meade, xi.

childhood, education and motives. Meade states that she utilized available primary sources, such as Eleanor's charters and letters; however, she relies heavily on biased twelfth- and thirteenth-century secondary sources.

Ralph V. Turner, however, provides an opposing view of Eleanor. Turner evaluates the negative perceptions of Eleanor in his 2008 article, "Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her 'Black Legend.'" The "black legend," a portrait of a "scandalous, frivolous woman," formed when the Church restricted and redefined women's public and gender roles.⁷ The Church believed that women had a sinful nature, and so it promoted the Virgin Mary as a good role model for subordinate women.⁸ Turner argues that Eleanor of Aquitaine's largely unflattering portrayal demonstrates her failure to meet a misogynistic standard for women during a redefinition of gender roles. Medieval clergy and later English chroniclers, like Gervase of Canterbury, John of Salisbury, and Gerald of Wales, wrote sources on Eleanor that drip with disdain or document rumors because powerful, independent women were seen as unnatural and wrong. Turner reasons that twelfth-century writers' negative view of women shaped later chroniclers' interpretation of Eleanor, producing the influential "black legend."

Michael Evans criticizes previous interpretations of Eleanor, and like Turner, disagrees with Meade's argument for Eleanor's uniqueness. In his 2009 article, "A Remarkable Woman? Popular Historians and the Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine," Evans argues that Eleanor was not unique but merely an outstanding example of the admirable power twelfth-century noblewomen could wield. He shows that Eleanor's power derived from her inheritance, not so much from a remarkable personality.⁹ Looking at works by Meade and Strickland, Evans reveals how popular nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians created misleading images of Eleanor and medieval women in general. These three authors formed an

⁷ Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her 'Black Legend,'" 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁹ Michael Evans, "A Remarkable Woman? Popular Historians and the Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *Studies in Medievalism: Defining Medievalism(s)* XVIII (2009): 246.

unfavorable cycle of scholarly ambiguity: Historians understood the duchess's actions in light of her character, and they knew of her character because of the duchess's actions. Using texts by John of Salisbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil, Evans refutes the assumption of Eleanor's distinctiveness. He states that the duchess was just one of many remarkable women, though the individuality of Eleanor's position ranks her first compared to the other medieval women of status.

Katherine Crawford combines the earlier authors' theses into one line of research. Comparing six books on various queens in 2012, Crawford surveyed similar gender ideology trends surrounding aristocratic women in differing national contexts. Her article, "Revisiting Monarchy: Women and the Prospects of Power," argues that courtly women maintained a dynamic role in gender-biased social and political systems. Researching royal women like Eleanor and Maria of Castile, Crawford reveals that though men attempted to repress women's power, women used gender ideologies and stereotypes to their advantage. For example, Eleanor's rejection of stereotypes later won her admiration, while Catherine of Aragon manipulated the image of a cast-aside wife to gain sympathy from the public.¹⁰ Despite being barred from major political opportunities, royal women facilitated palace functions, negotiated economic productivity, and enabled men to maintain power.

Evolving over time, historians' perceptions of Eleanor and her remarkable life widely differ. Some, like Meade, promote the duchess-queen as a unique beacon of feminism, while like Evans, other historians argue Eleanor only exemplified the considerable power aristocratic women could hold in the twelfth-century. Earlier historians, such as Strickland's unreliable fabrications, simply fanned the flames of vicious rumors sparked by medieval chroniclers. In contrast, Turner, Crawford, and other modern historians sifted through the old prejudices and perceptions to shed fresh light unto Eleanor's career.

¹⁰ Katherine Crawford, "Revisiting Monarchy: Women and the Prospects of Power," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 163, 165.

These historians well address the legends and biased sources surrounding Eleanor of Aquitaine, but most of them lament the absence of Eleanor's motives, emotions, childhood, and personal life in documentation, which leaves a gaping hole in our understanding of her career. One topic they do not address is the legacy of Eleanor of Aquitaine in women's history. While the studies are extremely helpful with understanding medieval gender roles and the biographical information on Eleanor, none of them addressed how Eleanor's political career might have affected aristocratic women after her. While Evans believes other women held power like Eleanor's, he fails to articulate this insight further. He focuses on the negative interpretations of Eleanor and what caused the biases. Exploring this significant topic would redefine our knowledge of medieval women in politics and add to the scholarship of the duchess-queen. Eleanor of Aquitaine wielded substantial political power; the legacy she left to noblewomen after her death needs to be explored.

Eleanor gained the title Queen of France upon her marriage to Louis VII in 1137. The couple was both young and inexperienced, prompting rash decisions and encouraging counselors to vie for the king's ear and favor. The years before the Second Crusade would reveal the young king's lack of judgment and reckless decisions, often spurred on by his wife.¹¹ Much to the displeasure of the courtiers, Eleanor exhibited significant influence over her husband through intercession in the marriage's early years. Intercession constituted a vital component of a queen's duty in the Middle Ages, functioning "as an acceptable avenue of queenly influence and power," precisely because queenship "was a type of motherhood" where the queen sought the best interest for her "children," the people.¹² Even if denied official political involvement, the queen could still intervene and persuade the king, because of the intimate, personal access to her husband.

¹¹ Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 40.

¹² Kristen Gaeman, "Queen's Gold and Intercession: the Case of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 46, no. 2 (2010): 11.

Eleanor visibly exercised her rights of intercession with Louis on one major occasion. Petronilla, Eleanor's younger sister, was romantically involved with Count Ralph of Vermandois, which Eleanor wholeheartedly supported. Louis, "incapable of resisting the insistence of Eleanor," found bishops to nullify the count's previous marriage, and marry Petronilla and Ralph.¹³ The scandalous marriage so outraged the rejected wife's uncle, Theobald of Blois-Champagne, that he convinced the pope to excommunicate the newlyweds.¹⁴ Louis VII, indignant from Theobald's opposition, invaded Champagne in the summer 1142. Tragically, when Louis's men invaded the town of Vitry, they burned to the ground the church providing refuge for the townspeople. Several hundred people burned to death inside, while the king helplessly watched from outside the town.¹⁵ Louis is reported to have transformed into a different man after the massacre, becoming staunchly religious and seeking the counsel of Bernard of Clairvaux and Suger of Saint-Denis. Despite the tragedy, Eleanor stubbornly pushed for the revocation of the couple's excommunication, possibly bribing two cardinal deacons.¹⁶ In 1148, the Church finally divorced Ralph of Vermandois and his first wife, allowing the count and Petronilla to officially be wed.¹⁷ Eleanor was secretly blamed for the disaster, and her influence over Louis quickly deteriorated as the king now sought the advice of clergymen.

Regardless of the tension within the royal couple, Eleanor still held the title of Duchess of Aquitaine. Despite being king of France, Louis VII could not govern Aquitaine without Eleanor. While their marriage entitled him as duke, Louis needed to earn authoritative legitimacy over the Aquitainians by associating himself with the lawful duchess. He attempted to accomplish this by identifying himself with the duchess-queen's lineage of male ancestors. Most of Louis's Aquitanian charters, an official grant of authority or rights, confirmed the acts of Eleanor's ancestors, conveying the king's attachment to her

¹³ Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 63.

¹⁴ John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1956): chap. VI, 12.

¹⁵ Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 64.

¹⁶ John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, chap. VI, 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. VI, 13.

family.¹⁸ Aquitaine was never a truly united duchy, but rather constructed of factions overseen by barons who rarely agreed. These barons despised rule from anyone besides an Aquitanian, which is why Louis attempted to graft himself into Eleanor's lineage and identify as an "Aquitanian."

From 1137 to 1152, only sixteen charters show that Eleanor governed her duchy alongside Louis, confirming the notion of her "limited sphere of action."¹⁹ Of these sixteen, four were issued solely by the queen-duchess, and even these confirmed issues decreed by Louis. In a charter from 1139, Eleanor presented the Knights Templar with gifts of mills and houses in La Rochelle from her possessions. Except in the greeting where the duchess introduces herself, Eleanor used plural pronouns ("we wish," we have given," "we grant") throughout the rest of the charter.²⁰ Though the lands granted to the Knights Templar were originally Eleanor's, the pronoun plurality referenced her marriage and shared power. Two charters from 1140 and 1141 confirmed gifts given to the nuns of Notre Dame de Saintes that "[Eleanor's] husband granted" or "with the assent of Louis King of the Franks."²¹ Eleanor's 1140 letter used personal, singular pronouns when doing Louis's bidding, while the 1141 official letter used the plural pronouns again.

French society denied Eleanor unrestricted power over Aquitaine, even as heiress, and she held no official authority as queen of France. Especially under Louis and his father, Louis VI, the French government centered on the king's authority, reducing the queen's role and power.²² One of the first victims to this centralization, Eleanor's power extended only to Aquitanian matters and personal influence. During the twelfth century, men's intolerance for powerful women grew, preferring subordinate and weak-willed women. The Church instigated this low perception of women by portraying

¹⁸ Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine, 1137-1189," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 60.

¹⁹ Brown, "Chapter 2: Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine," 57.

²⁰ Eleanor of Aquitaine, "A Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1139)," no. 1, in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/891.html>.

²¹ Two letters by Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor (1140, Dec. 28)" and "Letter from Eleanor (1141)," both in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/893.html> and <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/895.html>.

²² Brown, "Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine, 1137-1189," 57.

females as the evil seed of Eve, inheriting the temptress's wickedness.²³ The Church promoted the Virgin Mary as a role model for good, subordinate women to combat their inherited sinfulness.²⁴ Powerful women who defied traditional feminine standards, like the queen-duchess, were considered unnatural and wrong. It is understandable why Eleanor experienced this diminishing of female power, with Louis's father initiating the decline and with great religious men being her king's closest advisors.

Eleanor's involvement in the Second Crusade greatly contributed to highly negative perceptions of her, exemplifying the "wickedness" of women in general. It was not unusual for women to participate in a crusade, though men believed it threatened the mission's success. Noblewomen could join their crusading husbands and fathers, and several noblewomen besides Eleanor participated in the Second Crusade.²⁵ Multiple reasons motivated Eleanor to journey with the crusaders to the Holy Land. First of all, Eleanor shared conventional religious beliefs, so the idea of worshipping in Jerusalem would have been emotionally stirring. According to the Church, pilgrimages rewarded participants for their sacrificial journey, so Eleanor likely sought both the security of her soul and the ability to bear a son. Secondly, the queen possibly craved the excitement and adventure that Paris could not provide. Aquitaine and the rest of Southern France "lived for pleasure as an ideal to pursue," and the aristocrats, including women, lived a flamboyant lifestyle.²⁶ In contrast, Northern France possessed a strict puritanical culture because of the Church's heavier influence there. Lastly, the king probably encouraged Eleanor to accompany him for two reasons. Though reportedly not sexually attracted to his queen, Louis possessed an intense infatuation for Eleanor, and presumably could not bear long separations from his wife.²⁷ Also, Louis likely felt more comfortable leaving Abbot Suger behind with the kingdom's administration rather than Eleanor, and the

²³ Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her "Black Legend," 22.

²⁴ Ibid., 23.

²⁵ Meade, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 72.

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

²⁷ Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 73.

Aquitainian barons may have participated more willingly in the Crusade with their duchess's accompaniment.

Clergymen viewed crusading women unfavorably, however, so Eleanor's involvement in the Crusade earned their disdainful condemnation and provoked rumors of her shocking behavior. In many cases, the chroniclers only mentioned Eleanor if she did something wrong, improper, or scandalous. In his *Historia Pontificalis*, John of Salisbury documented the years 1148-1152 in which Eleanor, still married to Louis VII, supposedly committed adultery. While traveling on the Second Crusade, the long procession rested in the Principality of Antioch, which belonged to Eleanor's uncle, Prince Raymond. "The attentions paid by the prince to the queen" and their intense and continuous conversations "aroused the king's suspicion."²⁸ The suspicions strengthened when "the queen wished to remain behind" while the Crusaders pressed on; after hearing advice from close friends, Louis VII "tore her away and forced her to leave for Jerusalem."²⁹ After the miserable failure of the Second Crusade, people pointed fingers at antagonists like Prince Raymond and the queen for the embarrassment. While no chronicler blatantly accused Eleanor of incest, some, like John of Salisbury and Gerald of Wales, hinted at her immorality. Gerald referred to the incident as "a matter of sufficient notoriety on how she conducted herself in Palestine."³⁰

The rumors of incest reveals the anxieties the Church and men in general had about women, sexuality, and authority, especially when defining queenship. "Strong" women were viewed as promiscuous and sexually driven, so the chroniclers portrayed Eleanor as passionate, immoral, and driven by her desire. In the Middle Ages, adultery was a sin and crime, but the consequences for an unfaithful queen were significantly higher. The crime threatened the legitimacy of the royal heir, which she had not

²⁸ John of Salisbury, chap. XXIII, 52.

²⁹ Ibid., 53.

³⁰ Gerald of Wales, "Chap: XXVII: Comments on the Angevin Family," *De Instructione Principis*, in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/geraldwales-dip1.asp>.

produced yet, and demonstrated the “king’s lack of authority in his own household and kingdom.”³¹ The sexual and personal relationship between the royal couple came to be related to the political influence the queen had on the king. How the chroniclers depicted the queen’s scandals and desires suggest that Eleanor symbolized the “dangers of the queen’s intimacy with the king.”³² In essence, Eleanor embodied the very fear medieval men harbored: Women’s power, sexuality, and influence could blind and persuade men.

Expanding on the Antioch scandal, some modern historians have blamed Eleanor and her foolish behaviors entirely for the Second Crusade’s failure, even with the lack of supporting medieval evidence. Agnes Strickland asserted, rather dramatically and incorrectly, that “the freaks of Queen Eleanor” and her entourage were the sole cause “of all the misfortunes that befell King Louis and his army.”³³ Eleanor and her handmaidens were rumored to have masqueraded as Amazonian warriors, encumbering the army with their useless fanaticism. They apparently mocked the Frenchmen who possessed “good enough sense to keep out of this insane expedition,” shaming them into taking up the cross.³⁴ Once the crusaders were in Laodicea, Eleanor presumably disregarded Louis VII’s order to camp on high ground, and camped in a valley. The exposed camp was brutally attacked by the Arabs, resulting in the death of seven thousand crusaders as “penalty for their queen’s inexperience.”³⁵ Like the folk superstition of women aboard ships, women brought doom upon holy pilgrimages, so naturally Eleanor and her entourage were charged with the failure of the Second Crusade. The queen’s reputation was “blackened” after the Second Crusade, thus “shadowing her portrait with evil.”³⁶ Her marriage visibly deteriorated after the crusade, and the

³¹ Peggy McCracken, “Scandalizing Desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Chroniclers,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 250.

³² *Ibid.*, 258.

³³ Strickland, 165.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁶ Turner, “Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her “Black Legend,” 18.

pope had “to reconcile the king and queen...and confirm their marriage, both orally and in writing.”³⁷ Despite these attempts to repair the damages, the marriage ended in an annulment in 1152.

For a short time after her divorce, Eleanor reaffirmed her authority over Aquitaine. She hastily renounced Louis VII’s decrees, and replaced them with her own. For whatever reason, the disorderly barons highly favored Eleanor and heartily welcomed her rule, especially after the administration of a foreigner.³⁸ However, only eight weeks after the annulment, a young Henry II, the duke of Normandy and the duchess of Aquitaine wed. Eleanor’s interest in Henry likely grew from the prospect of her gaining a new royal title and that Aquitaine would be released from French control, becoming an autonomous territory again.³⁹ In 1154, the newlyweds were crowned king and queen of England after Stephen of Blois’ death. Creating the Angevin “empire,” Henry amassed his family lands which covered most of England and large parts of France.⁴⁰ Now that he had acquired France’s wealthiest and largest duchy, the king attempted to incorporate the duchy into his empire. Similar to what was occurring in France, the centralization of Henry’s power forced Eleanor into the political shadows, even in regards to Aquitaine.⁴¹ Eleanor experienced a drastically visible reduction of power during her marriage to Henry; she was no longer independent but encountered a strong-willed and ferocious husband. She vanished from all charters, English and Aquitanian, between the years 1157 and 1167.⁴² Only the patronage of religious houses and intercession gave Eleanor a productive outlet for her jurisdiction. For example, Bishop Anastasius IV of Sabina asked the queen to convince Henry to reinstall an abbot to the St. Michael

³⁷ John of Salisbury, chap. XXIX, 61.

³⁸ Krisana E. West, “For Power, Politics and Lust: The Queens of the Angevin Empire: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Berengaria of Navarre, and Isabelle of Angouleme” (PhD diss., Central Missouri State University, 2002), 43.

³⁹ Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “Eleanor of Aquitaine: Parent, Queen, and Duchess,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patron and Politician*, Symposia in the Arts and Humanities #3, edited by William W. Kibler (Austin: University of Texas, 1976), 15.

⁴⁰ Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 1.

⁴¹ Brown, “Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine,” 65.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 66.

monastery, since she “is a participant of mercy [and] a helper in good works.”⁴³ However, in 1167, Eleanor returned to the head of Aquitaine’s administration, not surprisingly because Henry failed to control all his territories and the disgruntled, rebellious Aquitanian barons. When Henry distributed pieces of his kingdom between his four sons, Richard inherited the title Duke of Aquitaine in 1174, and co-ruled alongside his mother Eleanor.

The most important role Eleanor fulfilled during her marriage to Henry II was that of mother. Despite the couple’s constant bickering, Eleanor gave birth to eight children, five sons and three daughters, well into her forties. Typical to royal families, the sons as potential heirs to the throne grew up under the tutelage of courtiers rather than with their mother, to be given an education befitting of future kings. Eleanor’s daughters, Matilda, Eleanor, and Joanna, remained with their mother until their betrothals, when they went to live with their new family. While they were still young, both her sons and daughters traveled frequently with Eleanor, crossing the Channel multiple times when her children were just toddlers and babies. This kind of frequent contact between mother and children was unusual for noblewomen in the Middle Ages. Aristocratic mothers were not neglectful, but rather had the means to hire caretakers and nurses to manage the children.⁴⁴ Except for announcements of childbirths, the chroniclers stayed silent in regards to Eleanor during her first sixteen years as queen of England. According to gender expectations and standards, Eleanor finally acted appropriately for a woman of her position by producing heirs and remaining out of politics.⁴⁵

This period of calm reversed drastically, however, in the year 1173 with a rebellion against King Henry II. In the years leading to 1173, the king angered his subjects by hoarding absolute powers and

⁴³ Anastasius, “Letter from Anastasius IV (1153),” ep. 215. in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/142.html>.

⁴⁴ RaGena C. DeAragon, “Wife, Widow, and Mother: Some Comparisons between Eleanor of Aquitaine and Noblewomen of the Anglo-Norman and Angevin World,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 102-3.

⁴⁵ West, “For Power, Politics and Lust,” 45.

possibly authorizing the murder of Thomas Beckett, the archbishop of Canterbury. After Easter of that year, the king of France, Henry's sons, and multiple duchies rose against King Henry II "and laid waste his French lands" in retaliation.⁴⁶ Many of Eleanor's contemporaries blamed the queen for influencing the revolt. Roger of Hoveden's account of the revolt only briefly mentioned the presence of the queen; however, he did not completely disregard the queen's participation. Gerald of Wales labeled the revolt as "a grave offense of [Henry's] sons against the father at the instigation of their mother."⁴⁷ Though chroniclers bitterly disapproved of the royal family, they avoided stating their hatred outright. They likely withheld their full-blown judgment to maintain royal favor and not anger the ones who had ultimate authority. Rotrou, the Archbishop of Rouen, composed a letter to the queen, reprimanding Eleanor for "opening the way for your own children to rise up against their father."⁴⁸ He reminded her of her duty as queen and wife to support the king and raise respectful sons. Rotrou implored Eleanor that a woman should submit dutifully to her husband in obedience to law, Scripture, and nature. He warned the queen that unless she obeyed Henry, her actions would "cause widespread disaster...and ruin for everyone in the kingdom."⁴⁹ The letter indeed reprimanded Eleanor's shocking behavior, but the tone was neither spiteful nor disrespectful. On the contrary, Rotrou commented on the queen's integrity, calling her "a most prudent woman," "most pious and illustrious queen," and as much of a "parishioner as her husband."⁵⁰ This might have been flattery or sweetening the sour message, but just as likely, Rotrou could have been genuinely complimentary and respectful of the queen's power and image.

⁴⁶ Richard of Hoveden, "The Revolt of 1173-4, from the Chronicle," in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/1173hoveden.asp>.

⁴⁷ Gerald of Wales, "Book I, Chapter 46: Description of Henry II, king of the English," *The Conquest of Ireland*, in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/12Cgerald-ireland2.asp>.

⁴⁸ Peter of Blois for Rotrou, the Archbishop of Rouen, "Letter 154 to Queen Eleanor, 1173," in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Feb. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/eleanor.asp>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

In contrast to Rotrou's kinder words, Gerald of Wales strongly hated the scandalous and misbehaved Angevin family, "for they all come of the devil, and to the devil they would go."⁵¹ In *De Instructione Principis*, Gerald questioned "how was it possible for the branches to be prosperous and virtuous" with a corrupt root.⁵² Because Eleanor's father presumably stole another man's wife, Gerald called the queen the child "of an open and detestable act of adultery," doomed to fruitlessness (though she obviously was not). Gerald asserted that Henry's heritage was as bad as Eleanor's, so any headstrong behavior by the king was hardly unexpected. Since both family lines were dripping with sin, "how then from such a union could a fortunate race be born?"⁵³ At the end of the century, Gerald spitefully recounted the Antioch scandal and also rumored that Eleanor "had been known by Henry II's own father," Geoffrey of Anjou.⁵⁴ Despite being forbidden by Geoffrey to touch Eleanor, Henry "defiled this so-called queen of France," stole her from Louis, and married her himself.⁵⁵ These malicious comments written after Eleanor's death show how the duchess-queen's actions disgusted some chroniclers, which the chroniclers fitted into their larger propagandistic schemes. Writers contemporary to Eleanor expressed both respect and repugnance for the controversial and bold queen.

After Henry II defeated the rebels in 1174, he captured Eleanor, who was fleeing to Paris. The king imprisoned her in Chignon Castle, where she remained until Henry's death some sixteen years later. During her house arrest, Richard le Poitevin bemoaned the removal of Eleanor and Richard the Lionheart, who both managed the court at Poitiers before the rebellion. As had occurred with Louis VII, the Aquitanian barons opposed this situation as Henry, a foreigner, would create unwelcomed change after replacing the duchess. Aquitaine's cultural differences caused wary distrust of people across the Loire

⁵¹ Gerald of Wales, "Chap: XXVII: Comments on the Angevin Family," *De Instructione Principis*, in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/geraldwales-dip1.asp>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

River. Thus, the genuinely distraught Richard le Poitevin prayed for the day when “[you, duchess,] will return to your lands.”⁵⁶ He painted Henry and his companions in a negative light, portraying them as backstabbers, uncultured barbarians, and evil oppressors.⁵⁷ This lament suggests Aquitainians’ support for the revolt and their duchess’s power. If both the duchess’s supporters as well as critics like Gerald of Wales spoke of her instigation, Eleanor indeed held tremendous political weight and persuasion.

As exemplified by the revolt, Eleanor certainly held political leverage during her husbands’ and sons’ lifetimes. However, her power thereafter was strictly limited to behind the scenes influence. Not until after Henry II’s death in 1189 did Eleanor finally experience political freedom. Her sons’ reigns can explain this change in authority; a strong political figure was needed with Richard I on crusade and in light of King John’s upsets. More charters and letters of Eleanor’s exist after Henry’s death, especially in 1199, than from her time as queen-regent. Though she held no official position in English government, Eleanor became respected, even reluctantly by the chroniclers, in her widowhood. Her role as queen-mother also “gave her a prominent part in English politics.”⁵⁸ Also, both Richard and John held strong attachments and affections toward their mother, more than they ever had shown for their father, Henry II.

Richard inherited the title of king of England after his father’s death. The king needed a trustworthy individual to administer England during his continental ventures, as Richard spent only six months of his ten-year reign in England. When Richard journeyed on the Third Crusade from 1189-1192 and then was held ransom by King Henry VI of Germany, Eleanor substituted as ruler until his return. Two letters from Richard to his mother provided valuable insight into Eleanor’s role during his absence. Richard thanked his mother for her “loyalty, faithful care, and diligence you give to our lands,” and continued by

⁵⁶ “Richard the Poitevin Laments Eleanor’s Removal to England,” in Fiona Swabey, *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Courtly Love, and the Troubadours* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004): 128.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Turner, “Eleanor of Aquitaine in the Governments of Her Sons Richard and John,” 78.

declaring that Eleanor's prudence and discretion caused the kingdom to remain peaceful.⁵⁹ In the two letters, Richard requested Eleanor's "hasty promotion" in naming Hubert, Bishop of Salisbury, as Archbishop of Canterbury according to the king's wishes,⁶⁰ urging her "with all possible devotion, that you carry this business to its conclusion with all speed."⁶¹ This statement and similar ones show the trust Richard invested in Eleanor and her political abilities; he clearly was confident placing important matters into his mother's capable hands.

King Richard abruptly died in March of 1199 from a gangrenous arrow wound while fighting the French King Phillip II. Back in 1190, Richard had declared his nephew, Arthur of Brittany, as heir; however, before his death, the king chose his brother, John, as his successor. This uncertainty shaped 1199 into a greatly confusing and volatile time. Arthur's mother, Constance, another strong-willed woman, fought to have the nephew claim the throne. Eleanor deeply distrusted Constance and Arthur, since the nephew was raised by Philip II, an enemy of the Angevins. Eleanor flew into action, campaigning to establish John's right to the throne over Arthur's. The duchess attempted to create support for John by correcting wrongs against the barons and giving gifts to the nobility and religious houses, especially Fontevraud Abbey, which she founded.⁶² John was crowned king of England in April 1199, with much help and assistance from his mother's efforts.

Seeking loyalty for John both before and after his coronation, the contents of the queen's 1199 charters and letters cover a wide range of topics: grants and gifts, confirmations, and intercessions, amongst others. Eleanor assigned an annual rent of ten pounds to the abbey of Fontevraud in France,

⁵⁹ Richard I, "Letter from Richard, King of England (1193)," ep. 399. in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/148.html>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199)," 2nd series, BEC 19, 339-40. In the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Sept. 22, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/889.html>.

with a lifetime compensation for Chaplain Roger and any future abbess.⁶³ To honor the late Richard I's soul, William de Mauze presented the abbey a monetary gift of one hundred pounds a year, which Eleanor declared would be used "for the ladies' tunics and not for any other use."⁶⁴ The gift was in gratitude for Eleanor returning to him lands that Richard had seized. Many other aristocrats faced similar situations, and Eleanor restored most lands back to the barons to gain support for King John. Eleanor's charter for the monastery of St. John of Poitiers "wished and commanded that the liberty and immunity" granted them "be preserved there."⁶⁵ The queen reconfirmed the freedoms and rights granted to the monastery by Eleanor's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.⁶⁶ In two similar charters, Eleanor granted the island community of Oleran off of France's Atlantic coasts the liberties and customs, such as marriage laws, that her ancestors had established.⁶⁷ The queen also granted the entire fief of Sancta Severa to her friend and relative, Andreas of Chauvigny,⁶⁸ and a pond and some mill-houses to the abbey of St. Mary of Tourpignac in Poitou, France in honor of the late King Richard.⁶⁹

Even on her deathbed, Eleanor was still considered a strong political force. In 1200, John set aside his marriage to Isabella of Gloucester and married Isabelle of Angoulême, deeply offending his new bride's prior betrothed, Hugh IX of Lusiana, Italy. This absurd dishonor outraged many barons, causing the Viscount of Thouars, the most important Poitevin noble, to seek Eleanor's advice.⁷⁰ After reasoning with the viscount, Eleanor wrote to King John, stating that the viscount "will now serve you truly and faithfully

⁶³ Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/889.html>.

⁶⁴ Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/886.html>.

⁶⁵ Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine, (May 4, 1199)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1327.html>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199)," no. 508, in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1329.html>.

⁶⁹ Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (April 21, 1199)," no. 489, in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1326.html>.

⁷⁰ "Two Letters Dating from Eleanor's Old Age," in Swabey, 130.

against all men.”⁷¹ Roger of Hoveden recorded that Eleanor focused on having “all freemen of the whole kingdom” swear fidelity to their king “for life and limbs and earthly honor.”⁷² From her deathbed in 1200, Eleanor and the Constable of Auvergne convinced the rebellious Viscount Thoarc of the wrongs he had committed against John by seizing the king’s land and supporting those who had opposed the king. The viscount “conceded benevolently” and pledged that he would remain faithful to King John.⁷³ Eleanor deftly handled the different political issues brought before her. The older queen possessed a political authority second only to the king as she granted land exchanges, confirmed money donations, changed societal laws, and acted as a diplomat.

Throughout her life, but especially in her widowhood, Eleanor’s influence also extended to religious patronage and the Church. Clerics were the intercessors between earth and heaven, but they also possessed significant amounts of land and wealth, making either powerful allies or enemies. Helping the Church through either intercession or donations produced spiritual, economic, social and political benefits. Notably, high-ranking clergymen often sought the queen for assistance in furthering their agendas. Geoffrey, prior of the Canterbury convent, implored Eleanor to continue her protection and patronage of the convent. The prior wrote of the queen’s generosity and diligence, and alluded to rumors against the convent: “[D]o not believe any suggestion from anyone about us before the truth is established.”⁷⁴ The letter begged the queen to “protect [the convent] under the shadow of your wings” and prevent any unjust oppression of them.⁷⁵ The convent had sent a similar letter to King Richard in which the monks sought favor by flattering his ego; however, they sought direct protection from

⁷¹ Ibid., 130.

⁷² Jane Martindale, “Epilogue: Eleanor of Aquitaine and a “Queenly Court”?,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 428.

⁷³ Eleanor of Aquitaine, “Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1200),” in the Epistolae: Medieval Women’s Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/900.html>.

⁷⁴ Geoffrey, “Geoffrey, prior, and the convent of Christ Church, Canterbury (Jan. 1192),” ep. 393. in the Epistolae: Medieval Women’s Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/147.html>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Eleanor.⁷⁶ Clergymen placed significant faith in Eleanor's political aptitude to fix the monasteries' problems.

At a later date, the Canterbury convent again sought Eleanor's intercession, but this time over a dispute about the rebuilding of the chapel of Lambeth. The monks requested the queen "to preserve the king's grace towards us" and "beseech for us."⁷⁷ Because of the queen's goodness, the convent "confidently brought [their] needs and troubles" to Eleanor.⁷⁸ Eleanor also helped other churches besides the Canterbury convent. Jocelin of Brakelond chronicled the formation of St. Edmund's Abbey during Eleanor's lifetime. He mentioned how King Richard demanded one thousand marks for the purchase of the Manor of Mildenhall, and as according to custom, Eleanor would receive ten percent.⁷⁹ She magnanimously received a gold chalice for payment but restored the chalice back to the abbey in honor of the late King Henry II, as it was Henry who originally gave the chalice to St. Edmund.⁸⁰ These chronicles reveal the strong bonds Eleanor of Aquitaine shared with churches. Different monasteries sought the queen's help and intercession throughout her political career. Confident in Eleanor's political influence and natural ability, the clergymen diligently entrusted their agendas and problems to the queen.

The ten-percent custom that Jocelin of Brakelond mentioned in his chronicle was called queen's gold. Queen's gold was a cash gratitude payment, or equivalently valued item, for the queen's intercession on the payer's behalf.⁸¹ As queen of England during Henry II's reign, Eleanor received queen's gold, typically a gold mark for every hundred silver marks paid to the king. After Henry's death, Eleanor

⁷⁶ Joan Ferrante, "Historical Context for letter: Geoffrey, prior, and the convent of Christ Church, Canterbury (Jan 1192), ep. 393.

⁷⁷ "Letter from the Convent of Canterbury," ep. 472. in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/150.html>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Jocelin of Brakelond, "Chronicle of the Abbey of St. Edmund's (1173-1202)," (Sept. 1189). In the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/jocelin.asp>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Gaeman, 12-14.

continued to receive the queen's gold stipend during her sons' reigns, even after they both married.⁸² Richard and John both elevated Eleanor's status as queen-regent above their own wives, and she reaped the benefits. In addition to the queen's gold and Aquitaine's revenues, Richard bestowed on Eleanor income from her dower lands and from Norman farms.⁸³ In 1199, John published the agreement between him and his mother, acknowledging Eleanor's right to hold "all Poitou [Aquitaine] with the whole inheritance and acquisition" during the king's lifetime.⁸⁴ Eleanor and John established a joint-rights agreement over the duchy that "she would give away nothing without [John's] assent and counsel," nor could John "without her assent and counsel."⁸⁵ Only after Eleanor's death were the queen's gold and her dower lands in England, Normandy and Poitou given to another queen or returned to the king's domain. Eleanor certainly deserved financial rewards and political freedom after almost seventy years of relentless service to four kings and three countries. This remarkable duchess-queen died in April 1204 around eighty years of age, unusually old for medieval standards. Eleanor of Aquitaine was buried alongside Henry II, her beloved Richard, and daughter Joanne at Fontevraud Abbey, where she spent her last years. During her final years, Richard of Devizes, England, a Benedictine monk, wrote praises of Eleanor that beautifully summarized her strong political career: Queen Eleanor, "tireless in her labors," exhibited abilities "her age might marvel" at and "qualities rarely found in a woman."⁸⁶

After her death, Eleanor left behind a political legacy that greatly influenced her female descendants and other noblewomen. Eleanor's successors continued using the religious and political avenues of power that Eleanor utilized. Hereditary rule became established as a way of guaranteeing a dynasty and legacy; typically, only male relatives inherited the throne. However, whenever a male heir

⁸² Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine: Parent, Queen, and Duchess," 23.

⁸³ Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine in the Governments of Her Sons Richard and John," 78.

⁸⁴ John I, "A Letter from John, King of England (1199)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/867.html>.

⁸⁵ John I, "A Letter from John, King of England (1199)."

⁸⁶ "Excerpt from the Chronicle of Richard of Devizes," in Swabey, 124.

did not exist, was too young, or was considered unsuitable, powerful women filled the void. Often times, unstable political situations or vacuums created by no male heir lead women to abandon their traditional roles, just as Eleanor did during the years between Richard's and John's reigns in England. Women from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century exercised certain types of power within "socially-accepted spheres," such as Hildegard of Bingen in religious literature and Matilda of Boulogne's political support of her husband, Stephen of Blois.⁸⁷ Despite the decline of official female authority, aristocratic women continued their predecessors' political practices in terms of religion, queenly duties and roles, and even control of property.

Aristocratic women found supporting religious houses, or even joining them, an increasingly positive channel for exercising their power and influence. The growing number of women's religious communities, usually prompted by wealthy contributions from women just like Eleanor, reflected the noticeable presence of women in the religious sphere. Eleanor herself founded and supported numerous abbeys and nunneries, like Fontevraud Abbey in France, and her female descendants followed her example. Berengaria of Navarre, Richard the Lionheart's wife, struggled to regain her dower lands' income after Richard's death in order to endow an abbey.⁸⁸ She sparred twenty years against King John for the monies he promised, but not until Henry III succeeded John did Berengaria receive her rightful income. With the dowry money, she graciously donated to religious institutions, and purchased land in France to build the Cistercian abbey of Pietas Dei of l'Epau.⁸⁹ Eleanor's blood descendants favored the Cistercian order, beginning with the foundation of the Las Huelgas Abbey in Spain by Eleanor's daughter, Queen Leonor. Leonor's youngest daughter, Constanza, never married but served as a nun in her mother's

⁸⁷ West, "For Power, Politics and Lust," 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 96.

abbey.⁹⁰ Another of Leonor's daughters, Queen Blanche of Castile, founded four Cistercian abbeys in Paris and Maubuisson, France, between 1236 and 1253.⁹¹ Blanche's cousin, Countess Isabelle of Chartres, made numerous gifts to Cistercian monks and nuns, and also founded at least two nunneries in France as well.⁹² These relatives of Eleanor are just a few examples of the numerous aristocratic women who exercised power through religious patronage.

Other noblewomen also found their persuasive voice by joining nunneries. Religious houses taught their charges to read, write, play music, and other skills, sometimes basing this upon Peter 4:10: "that each one who has received grace should share it," providing an education possibly unavailable outside of the holy walls to some.⁹³ This ecclesiastical education gave numerous women the ability to voice their opinion without intense condemnation. One such nun of nobility was Hildegard of Bingen, renowned for her religious visions, musical and literary compositions, and sound judgement. During the late 1100s, Hildegard comforted Eleanor, telling her to "attain stability in God," and advised Henry II to follow the way of justice and not his will.⁹⁴ Abbeys allowed Hildegard to counsel royalty, just as it gave other noblewomen a similar religious platform.

Despite an arguable decline in official power, the title of queen still held considerable amounts of authority over king and kingdom. Queenly status positioned women in public roles usually closed to their gender.⁹⁵ Intercession continued to be an approved avenue of influence for women, as long as it only involved pleading mercy for individuals or groups. Queen Leonor held significant sway over her husband,

⁹⁰ Miriam Shadis and Constance Berman, "A Taste of the Feast: Reconsidering Eleanor of Aquitaine's Female Descendants," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 188.

⁹¹ Shadis and Berman, 189.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 190.

⁹³ Alcuin Blamires, ed., *Women Defamed and Women Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 251.

⁹⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, "A Letter from Hildegard of Bingen [to Eleanor of Aquitaine], (1154 to 70)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Jan. 10, 2016, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1187.html>.

⁹⁵ Robert Bucholz and Carole Levin, "Introduction: It's Good to Be Queen," in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, eds. Robert Bucholz and Carole Levin (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), xvi.

Alfonso VIII of Castile, which prompted men to “exploit her position, thus recognizing her important political role.”⁹⁶ On the other hand, if intercession strayed into influencing the king on policy or patronage, the misogynistic fears began to reemerge.⁹⁷ However, this did not stop some queens, such as Blanche of Castile, from influencing their kings. Like Eleanor, Blanche possessed strong leverage over her son, Louis IX, and dictated his directions of religious patronage, obviously favoring the Cistercian order, even after his marriage to Marguerite of Provence.⁹⁸ Queen’s gold also continued after the twelfth century. Eleanor of Castile, Eleanor’s great-great-granddaughter, and Eleanor of Provence both received monetary compensation for their queenly influence, demonstrating that “English queens made bureaucracy work for them instead of being marginalized by it.”⁹⁹ Eleanor’s strong use of intercession continued to be a vital function to following queens.

Despite the decline in authority, the title of queen still held substantial juridical weight beyond just intercession. Some queens were fortunate enough to become respected and powerful political figures alongside their husbands or sons, just as Eleanor had become. Castile’s king Alfonso VIII greatly relied on his wife, Queen Leonor, for political assistance. Leonor served as regent during her husband’s absences and ruled alongside her two sons, Fernando and Enrique, before her death in 1214.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Blanche of Castile assumed regency for her son in 1223 after her husband’s passing.¹⁰¹ This continued well into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Another of Eleanor’s descendants, Maria of Castile, similarly held the sovereign authority of a king in all civil, military, and criminal matters from 1432 to 1453 while King Alfonso V was occupied in Italy. Alfonso deemed Maria his “alter ego” in the political sphere in which she was

⁹⁶ Shadis and Berman, 187.

⁹⁷ Bucholz and Levin, xxv.

⁹⁸ Shadis and Berman, 194.

⁹⁹ Gaeman, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Shadis and Berman, 185.

¹⁰¹ Shadis and Berman, 193.

comparatively successful.¹⁰² If disgruntled subjects biased against Maria appealed to Alfonso in Italy, the king typically supported his wife's decision.

The inheriting and holding of property boosted noblewomen's power, as it had for Eleanor. Generally, women obtained land through marriage dowries, inheritance, and wills after a relative's death. Eleanor, for example, inherited Aquitaine from her father, but through her marriages and her sons' grants, she administered a large amount of European territory. King John's second wife, Isabelle, was the countess of Angoulême, a geographically important region in Aquitaine. Like Eleanor, Isabelle ruled Angoulême in her own right, even after she was no longer Queen of England.¹⁰³ Women of Aquitaine and Southern France possessed more freedom to own land than women in the north, because as previously mentioned, the misogynist Church socially and culturally regulated Northern France to a greater degree. However, this did not hinder other women from owning or governing lands. Marguerite and Isabelle, Eleanor and Louis VII's granddaughters through Alix, both outlived their male relatives and inherited the valuable territories of Blois and Chartres in France. After their deaths, Marguerite and Isabelle's own daughters inherited the land from their mothers.¹⁰⁴ Eleanor's great-granddaughters, Jeanne and Marguerite, ruled the economically vital Flanders region for a combined fifty-two years between 1212 and 1278. Jeanne managed Flanders until her death, when Marguerite assumed the responsibility; both countesses ruled without the assistance of any count or consort.¹⁰⁵ Eleanor's example helped lead these thirteenth-century noblewomen to realize the political power they could possess.

Eleanor of Aquitaine played an indirect role in the formation of medieval and early modern Europe through her resources, wit, and royal connections. The wealth and land the duchess acquired through her inheritance and marriages gave her the authority to financially support religious institutions and the

¹⁰² Crawford, 162-3.

¹⁰³ West, 127.

¹⁰⁴ Shadis and Berman, 195.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

credibility to administrate. Because of her inheritance, Eleanor was a desirable match for Louis VII and Henry II, giving her the title and benefits of queenship. Between both marriages, Eleanor produced ten children, nine of whom became kings and queens or married into royalty and power. The majority of her descendants married royalty or aristocrats across the entire continent, acknowledging Eleanor as the “Grandmother of Europe.” Her female descendants constituted an essential part of court, despite the limitations of women’s authority. Eleanor’s lifelong political career acted as a guiding compass for other queens to follow. She influenced her descendants and successors to follow her famous example in the practices of intercession, property rights, and queenly role. Despite suppression of public authority, women were still able to shape the landscape of Europe, making Eleanor of Aquitaine a trailblazer who transformed politics for future aristocratic women.

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