

Eleanor of Aquitaine - II

Lead: Turned out by one royal husband, the King of France, Eleanor of Aquitaine married his rival, the future King of England.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts

Content: Strong and independent, Eleanor resisted at each stage of her career the role of quiet docile wife. After a stormy fifteen years in 1152, Louis VII of France had their marriage annulled. Their four daughters remained with the King and Eleanor was sent home to Poitiers a

very eligible lady, possibly the richest woman in Europe. Within two months she was married, this time to Henry Plantagenet, the namesake and grandson of the King of England who was at that time pressing his claim to inherit the Crown. A successful invasion of England and the death of his chief rival yielded him the throne. Henry and Eleanor became King and Queen of England in December 1154.

She began to concentrate on raising a family and delivered eight children over the succeeding years. During Henry's long and frequent absences in France, with his full confidence and support she made most decisions and was in effect the ruler of England. Despite his military success and the

significant legal and administrative progress made during his reign, Henry had a hard-time in personal relationships. His marital infidelity gradually wore down Eleanor's affection. He fell out with his old friend Archbishop Thomas Becket and indirectly caused his murder. Henry's three eldest sons were so hostile to their father that, probably with their mother's coaching, they rebelled against the King. Henry easily defeated this family revolt but Eleanor had to pay for her presumption by a decade of house arrest.

When her husband died in 1189, her favorite son, Richard, became King. Like his father, he had interests elsewhere, most especially as a

Crusader in Palestine. While he was gone, Eleanor again acted as regent and when Richard was arrested on the way home from the Middle East and held in Austria, she arranged for the huge ransom payment which secured his release. After Richard's death she continued as an advisor to her son King John. Eleanor of Aquitaine died in 1204 after a long, vigorous career, a talented, aggressive, active participant in life more than equal to her male peers.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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