Eleanor of Aquitaine

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***Overview***

In the middle ages, the most prominent figure in the history of women was Eleanor of Aquitaine. Duke of Aquitaine, William was his father. She was married to the king of France, Louis VII. The relationship between the two was not much pleasant and it got sourced during the second crusade. Conflicts in their relationship resulted in divorces in 1152. After her divorced, she married to the king of England, Henry of Anjou. By the time of marriage Henry was not the king, he got the opportunity after the two years of their marriage. Eleanor of Aquitaine was highly involved and participated in the ruling of both empires that is the empire of England and the empire of France.

Queen had eight children, 3 daughters, and 5 sons. Sons of Eleanor of Aquitaine came forward against their father in 1173. By the time of conflicts between king and sons, the queen was giving favor to her sons which made the king anxious. He confined the queen as a punishment for getting involved in the conflict. In 1189, Henry II died and the empire was given to Richard II who was a lion-hearted king[[1]](#footnote-2). John was another son of the queen who came against Richard with the involvement of the king of France. Initially, the queen was in support of Richard however later she supported John after her grandson came forward for the throne claim. Eleanor of Aquitaine died at the age of 82 in 1204.

***Queen Role***

Eleanor of Aquitaine was famous for her energy, sharpness, intelligence, creativity, and remarkably long life. In the 12th century, she was a famous lady who played a major role and highlighted the importance and strength of the women in the region. Otherwise, before queen extraordinary role in the empire, women were considered a chattel but her impressive achievement changed the mindset of the people. In the chaos of the time, her enterprise and assets of brains brought benefits for her and empire like; struggle between state and church, and unrelenting conflicts among crusades, Capets, and Plantagenets. They considered queen for the advance civility during the time of conflicts by promoting the ideals of courtly love and by singing songs to appreciate through troubadours. In the era of imposing leaders and personalities including Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Becket, the queen emerged as a strong figure and got center stage.

While she was serving as a mother of King John and King Richard along with the consort of king henry II of England and King Louis VII of France, she got the spotlight among the powerful and important men of the time. She was the daughter and heir of the imperious William X, Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitiers, who had the prevalent realms in northwest Europe[[2]](#footnote-3). It was not the only largest kingdom in northwest Europe but also had greater power than the kingdom held by the France king. In 1137, the queen's father died and she entered into the matters of the empire. She inherited empire and obeying with the commands of a regional agreement.

***First Marriage***

To get the French throne she got married to the king of France at the age of 15. After the month of the wedding sixteen years old groom, King Louis VI died due to the conflicts for the throne. After the death of the king, Eleanor got the throne and became able to find a court life as queen of France. She was frustrated by the soft-tempered, shy, and quiet husband as she had a strong egoistic and royal vision for herself. Since childhood, she was admired by her egoistic behavior and discipline she showed in the circumstances of royal life so it was obvious for her to dislike the opposite temperament of her husband. It is her behavior and vision that made her able to play the role of queen of France.

With time she remained beautiful and appealing but her perception towards ruling and handling kingdom matters made her dominant and headstrong towards her husband. Louis was considered as Second Crusade from 1147 to 1149 while the queen took all the spotlight. The main reason that resulted in the conflict between the queen and Louis was the relationship of the queen with her uncle, which made Louis jealous as well as angry towards the queen. The conflicts became severe and Louis who once loved queen so much and even admired her skills, ready to let her go. Another reason to leave queen was the interest of the Capetian royal line as they had no son. Queen gave her two daughters while the king was hoping for the son who can support him and his empire in the future. In the end, conflicts resulted in a separation where Eleanor and Louis were too closely connected for the church to tolerate.

***Role after divorce***

After getting a divorce from King Louis, Queen retained the power of Poitou and Aquitaine. The wealth and power she reserved got combined with her beautiful appearance that was appealing for various famous personalities of the time. One of the people who admired the beauty of the queen most was Henry of Anjou (a domain bordering Poitou), soon to be known as Plantagenet. However, various historians believes that the queen had a relationship with the father of Henry before he met him while some claim that Henry father was the one who selected queen for his son Henry. The most interesting fact about the relationship between the queen and Henry was their age. Henry was an eighteen-year-old young boy while the queen was 30 years old mature lady by the time they felt affection for each other. Unlike the first husband, Henry had a strong political mind and surpassed physical courage that helps the queen to increase her power and increase the ambition for power. It was barely eight weeks of the queen’s divorce when Henry came forward to propose an older woman (queen) with dark-eyed beauty as his life partner[[3]](#footnote-4). Queen also look beyond the age of Henry and praised his physical strength and intelligent mind that was significant for royal objectives and self-confidence for any king. Marriage of Queen and Henry was the big question for the society especially because of the age difference, therefore manor showed opposition to the relationship. However, the queen kept everything apart and selected Henry as his second husband.

Its been two years of Eleanor and Henry marriage that Henry became king of England and people named him King Henry II while Eleanor became the queen of England. Henry got the largest kingdom starting from the Cheviots in the North to the Pyrenees in the south. They both handled this vast empire intelligently that is why their offspring became able to remain in power for about 330 years. The time period of the family and their stability in the royal ambition made the history of Eleanor as a power queen. Henry and Eleanor completed forty years of marriage and had seven children. They had more children but only seven of them reached adulthood where three were daughters and four were sons. The oldest son, the Young King Henry, died at the age of 28 while handling the troops against his father for the throne. Geoffrey was another disloyal son of Eleanor who came against his father died at the age of 28. The reason for Geoffrey, Duke of Brittany, remained a mystery. The other two sons’ names were Richard and John Lackland. Richard known as lionhearted king was the favorite son of Eleanor while John Lackland was the favorite son of Henry. Both sons became able to acquire the power of the region and got the crown of England. Eleanor not only looks after her sons to be grownup as a powerful man but also remained involved in the management of Poitou and Aquitaine domains.

Queen who was famous for her ego and rude behavior had a soft side as well. Historians believe that the queen had an egoistic appearance but she had a humble heart for the people. Activities of the queen at court in Poitiers show how a humble woman was present inside the aggressive queen. Captivated by the loving tale of King Arthur and account of the knights of his Round Table, queenengaged the court with beautiful poetrythat not only praised by the member of the court but also evoked the world of King Arthur. She got a bundle of courtly love and milieu of chivalry with troubadours[[4]](#footnote-5). Prior to the involvement of the queen, the court had stereotypes representing the superiority of men. Women were not the part of the court precept of chivalry believed that it is appropriate for women to raise their voice and they are meant to be silent. They were considered as passive goddesses that can be approached with worship. However, the life of the queen opposite side of the believes who was strong, energetic and showed the life of action.

With time conflicts start rising between the family members. Sons of queen became disloyal to his father and wanted queen favor to capture the throne. Due to the conflicts, cultural pursuits were ignored by the adult sons of the queen and revolt started with Henry in 1173. When the sons of the queen stood against their father, Eleanor came forward in favor of their sons. She not only morally supported her sons but also in the form of money and troop to get the throne. Even some historians believe that the queen was the one who made her sons get the throne from their father. The age difference that was ignored at the time marriage became the obstacle that leads to the relationship gap between queen and Henry, therefore, she opposed him during the time of conflicts. Henry was in love with the queen and the queen also loved his husband but she was more focused on empire and power. She believed that it will be much better if her sons hold the power rather then Henry. In the battle of the throne, she chose power instead of her husband and their relation. By using her son she wanted to rule England but her sons died during the revolt and only two loyal sons inherit the empire.

***Struggle for Power***

Rebellions lost their life and became unable to get the throne while King Henry II successfully held the power. During revolts, the king came to know about the intention of his wife and involvement through which she helped his disloyal son. The actions of the queen made the king angry and he confined her after getting victory over rebellions. She remained in prison till 1189 and dead of the king became the reason for the end of her punishment. When queen back to royal life her age was 67 and she started her life with the same strong and egoistic attitude. Historians claim that the queen attended the funeral of her husband with dry eyes while others believe that she still had the ambition to get the throne which made her heart hard for her husband's death.

Her chance went ahead on the heels of celebration arranged in the court of King Richard, an occasion where queen arrangement was made with the fullest proportion of pageanty[[5]](#footnote-6). The Third Crusade was in progress and crusading intensity had encompassed England. However, Eleanor saw the salvage of the Holy Land from the Turks as an interruption from the current business. The genuine concern according to the queen was not Saladin but rather the protection of the House of Plantagenet, especially in England. King Richard went against the permission of her mother and decided to join the campaign, a choice without a doubt powered by youth presentation in Poitiers to the universe of chivalric idylls of his mother. Like an Arthurian knight, Richard stood and moved with fearlessness and respect to safeguarding the blockaded city of Jerusalem.

It took five years to King Richard when he moved towards Jerusalem and in his absence, all power was in the hand of Eleanor. She handled all the matters of administration and also made his other son become part of the throne. John Lack lands attempted to seize the throne in his absence and participated in the matters of domains. King Richard on his return came into conflict with the Duke of Austria and lost his power. Duke of Austria put him into the imprisonment when queen decided to go meet the king of the region for the sake of son’s life. She returned to the empire with his son and both Richard and Lackland held the empire till death. During a rebellious vassal, both sons of the queen lost their lives near Aquitaine. They both died in 1199.

She attempted fruitlessly to get the pope to intercede, however, the eighty-year-old pope, Celestine III, was too shy to even think about responding. Phillip II stopped the chance to take Gisors and the Vexin from Richard. John at long last crossed the channel and attempted to stir the remainder of the Plantaganet grounds to his standard. He fizzled. He at that point aligned himself with Phillip. Eleanor joined aristocrats and normal people and all seaports confronting Flanders were safeguarded. At the point when John's soldiers landed, they were effectively overpowered. John figured out how to escape and some Welsh soldiers took Windsor. The manor was promptly laid attack. In the meantime, a payoff for Richard's discharge was declared, 1 lac marks. Eleanor and her spies raised assessments and purged church coffers with the aim to come to the amount. Initially, far less cash was raised and a few additional duties were given. After hearing that Richard could be without set soon, John sneaked out of Windsor and landed at Phillip's court. He attempted to prompt revolt; however, Eleanor demonstrated to be all the more dominant and better loved. His territories were seized and even Normandy would not adjust itself to John. By December, the payoff cash was at long last gathered and quickly transformed into victory. Due to the death of the king, a throne was inherited by John who was so young by the time he got the throne. With the approval of the queen, john was crowned king while most of the matter of the domain remained under her.Therefore, from the start of John's rule, regional wars against the Capetian leaders of France involved King John. With average political keen Eleanor settled that her granddaughter Blanche ought to wed the French King’s son, to ensure the harmony between the Plantagenets and Capets. Incredibly, in 1200 when she was about 80 years of age she crossed the Pyrenees on horseback to get Blanche from the Court of Castile.

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1. Amy Ruth Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (Harvard University Press, 1978). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. George T. Beech, “The Eleanor of Aquitaine Vase: Its Origins and History to the Early Twelfth Century,” *Ars Orientalis* 22 (1992): 69–79. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Karen M. Broadhurst, “Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patrons of Literature in French?,” *Viator* 27 (January 1, 1996): 53–84, https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.2.301122. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Amy Kelly, “Eleanor of Aquitaine and Her Courts of Love,” *Speculum* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 1937): 3–19, https://doi.org/10.2307/2848658. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. William W. Kibler, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patron and Politician* (University of Texas Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)