

Eleanor and the Angevin Empire

History

Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

Enquiry: What can the life of Eleanor of Aquitaine tell us about who held power in the Middle Ages?

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1152

Eleanor's marriage to King Louis VII of France ended in 1152. Once the couple had separated Eleanor returned to Aquitaine to rule as Duchess. Aged 28, Eleanor once again became a desired bride in Europe. She was single, young enough to have more children and in charge of a powerful and rich area of southern France. Eleanor was so desirable as a bride that two men tried to kidnap her on her journey from Paris to Aquitaine. Eleanor managed to avoid capture. Instead she focused on entering into marriage in a more traditional way. 8 weeks and 2 days after her separation from Louis, Eleanor married once again.



Eleanor and Henry

Eleanor's second husband was 19 year old Henry. He was Duke of Normandy as well as the Count of Anjou and Maine. This marriage was controversial at the time. Firstly Henry was 9 years younger than Eleanor. Traditionally in the Middle Ages older men married younger women, not the other way round! Also, Eleanor's second marriage happened only 8 weeks after her separation from King Louis. A **chronicle** from the time said that Eleanor and Henry married "without the **pomp** and ceremony that befitted their rank." It wasn't a big ceremony and didn't reflect their wealth and importance. Why was this wedding arranged so quickly?



Increased territories

It is possible the wedding took place quickly because Henry was seen as a **controversial** choice. He was the Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou and Maine. By marrying Henry, Eleanor added her lands of Aquitaine to Henry's lands in France. Eleanor knew this combination of territory meant the new couple were very powerful. It is likely she chose Henry as her husband for this reason. The new couple controlled more lands in France than King Louis VII of France! Louis and the French barons tried to capture Normandy and Aquitaine but Henry fought back and defended his and Eleanor's lands. The French King was defeated.



King and Queen of England

In 1154 Stephen, the King of England died. Previously, Stephen had made Henry his adopted son and heir to the English throne. Therefore in 1154 Henry became King Henry II of England, and Eleanor became the Queen of England as well as Duchess of Aquitaine. The royal couple now added England to the lands they ruled. Their combined lands now became known as the Angevin Empire.



Duchess of Aquitaine

If we examine **charters** issued in Aquitaine between 1156 and 1167 there is no mention of Eleanor. During this time it appears to have been ruled by Henry and not Eleanor. At this time Eleanor focused on raising their children. In, however, 1168 Eleanor returned to Aquitaine. There are several reasons for this. The people of Aquitaine hadn't enjoyed being ruled by Henry and often rebelled. Eleanor returned home to try and restore order. By 1168 Henry and Eleanor's marriage had also begun to breakdown. Henry was having relationships with other women. In 1167 these relationships became public knowledge.



Queen of England

Eleanor now had a second opportunity to be a Queen and gain power and influence. As the King's wife her most important role was to provide male heirs to throne. Eleanor was more than successful in this role - the couple had eight children between 1153 and 1167, including five sons. Providing Henry with heirs helped Eleanor gain power and respect with her husband and the people of England. As a result she regularly attended meetings of the English royal court. Henry also trusted her to lead the country whilst he was away fighting in France. But what about Aquitaine?



Duchess of Aquitaine

There are 15 surviving charters from Aquitaine between 1168 and 1172. These were all approved by Eleanor but mention either Henry or Richard (their son) as well. In 1172, however, there were 3 charters addressed to Eleanor's "own faithful followers." Eleanor was clearly taking back control of Aquitaine without any male influence or approval. There was a problem however- since marrying Henry most of Aquitaine's **taxes** went to him. Henry was also in control of the military. How much power did Eleanor really have as Duchess of Aquitaine in 1172? This situation probably frustrated Eleanor. Next lesson we'll find out what she did as a result



Glossary

Association - in connection with another person

Charters - a document containing a record, perhaps of a sale of land or settling a dispute.

Chronicle - a written record of events from the past

Civil war - a war between groups of people who live in the same country

Controversial - causing disagreement or argument

Pomp - special clothes, decorations and music at a ceremony

Taxes - large amounts of money received by a leader or government



Questions

1. Who was Eleanor's second husband?
2. What was the Angevin Empire?
3. Why don't any of the charters of Aquitaine between 1156 and 1167 include Eleanor's name? What was she doing?
4. How was Eleanor able to gain power and respect whilst in England between 1156 and 1167?
5. When Eleanor returns to Aquitaine in 1168, does she have complete control? Why?

