

# Eleanor and the Great Revolt

History

Lesson 3 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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# 1172

By 1172 Eleanor had been back in Aquitaine for 6 years. She was issuing charters in her own name and taking back some control over her lands. Previously Aquitaine had been ruled by Henry II whilst she was raising their children, however, Eleanor did not completely control her lands. Henry received the money raised by taxes and was in control of the army. This frustrated Eleanor - Aquitaine was her territory that she brought to their marriage. Was she really powerful if responsibility for the army and finance lay with her husband, and not her, the Duchess of Aquitaine? This was not the only reason for Eleanor's frustration with Henry.



# Toulouse

Through her grandmother Eleanor had a claim to Toulouse in France. This wasn't a strong claim but both her first husband Louis VII and Henry had fought to capture these lands on her behalf. This had led to tension in southern France. To avoid future conflict between Toulouse and Aquitaine Henry decided to make peace with the Duke of Toulouse. In February 1173 the Duke of Toulouse paid **homage** to King Henry of England and Henry Duke of Normandy, the royal couple's eldest son. Eleanor was outraged. The disagreement was between Aquitaine and Toulouse. Why was there homage to England and Normandy, but not Aquitaine? Were Eleanor and Aquitaine losing their independence to Henry II?



# Angry Children

Eleanor wasn't the only person annoyed by Henry's actions - his four surviving sons were angry too. People suspected King Henry II had been involved in the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket. Becket was the most important churchman in England (Archbishop of Canterbury) and well respected. Henry's sons were suspicious about their father's involvement.

Furthermore, to keep his eldest sons happy, Henry had given parts of the **Angevin Empire** to them to control. The eldest son Henry became Duke of Normandy and the second son Richard became Duke of Aquitaine. Unfortunately this made them power hungry and greedy.



# Open Revolt

Henry II and Eleanor's oldest son was named after his father. He was known as Henry "the Young King" because it was believed he would inherit his father's crown. When his younger brother John was given three castles he believed were his, Henry "the Young King" was furious with his father. So, Henry "The Young King" visited the court of the King of France Louis VII, Eleanor's first husband. Here, joined by his younger brothers Richard and Geoffrey and supported by angry French and English Barons, he plotted to overthrow his father so he could take become king!



# Eleanor and the Revolt

Eleanor joined the plot against Henry with her sons. We have no record of Eleanor's reasons for rebelling against her husband, therefore we can only **speculate**. Given that society in the Middle Ages believed in the **superior** position of men and that they should be obeyed, Eleanor's open **rebellion** against her husband is very unusual. Furthermore, Eleanor's husband was no ordinary man - he was the King of England! Betraying your King was considered one of the worst of crimes. **Treason** was often punished by execution. Eleanor knew if the revolt was unsuccessful she could face death.



# The Great Revolt, 1173-1174

Eleanor's involvement was short. King Henry II's troops captured her on her way to meet her sons in Paris. The revolt went ahead without her, beginning in France and eventually spreading to England. Many towns and cities in England were destroyed as rebel Barons torched castles and buildings to gain power. Eventually, Henry II successfully crushed the **rebellion** in England, then sailed to Normandy to seek a solution with his enemies. The revolt lasted 18 months. In September 1174, Henry's sons swore to be loyal and return to their father's service. They were forgiven.



# Outcomes for Eleanor

Eleanor wasn't as lucky as her sons - she was imprisoned for 16 years for her betrayal. She was only allowed out to see her sons at special occasions such as Christmas or when Henry II needed her to be seen at the royal court. She gained some freedoms and was allowed to travel to France from 1183 onwards after the death of her eldest son Henry. Despite this the Queen of England no longer had any political influence in England. The Great Revolt had allowed King Henry II to show his power and control whilst removing Eleanor's.





# Glossary

**Angevin Empire** - the name given to Eleanor and Henry's joint lands.

**Homage** - to show your respect to someone by praising them publicly.

**Rebellion** - where people fight against the leaders of their country.

**Speculate** - to guess possible answers to a question when you do not have enough information to be certain

**Superior** - better than other things

**Treason** - in the Middle Ages the crime of doing something that would harm your leader or country.



# Questions

1. In what ways did Henry II still control Aquitaine in 1172?
2. Why would the homage between the Duke of Toulouse and King Henry II have annoyed Eleanor?
3. Why did Henry “the young King” begin a revolt against his father?
4. Why was Eleanor’s involvement in the Great Revolt 1173-1174 unusual?
5. What were the outcomes of the Great Revolt 1173-1174 for:
  - a) Henry and Eleanor’s sons?
  - b) Henry II?
  - c) Eleanor?

