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ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE



ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE

CRUSADER QUEEN

Loathed, adored, celebrated and damned, the rebellious Eleanor of Aquitaine defied her gender, waged war and crafted Medieval Europe into a land she could rule

Written by Frances White

When Pope Eugene III requested that Louis VII, king of France, lead a Crusade to help rescue the Crusader states in the Middle East, he took up the sword with enthusiasm. However, Louis would not travel to the Holy Land alone. His wife, adored by him, despised by others, did not plan to sit back and wait at home for her husband to return. Eleanor of Aquitaine's launch and involvement in the Second Crusade would go down in myth and legend. It is said that the queen rode through the streets of Vézelay dressed in the costume of an Amazon upon a white steed, brandishing her sword and urging the people to join her. Whether it truly occurred or not, this image of the warrior queen has survived through the centuries, and her enduring connection with the Second Crusade would see Eleanor damned for its failure.

Eleanor was born to rule. The first child of William X, Duke of Aquitaine, her doting father bestowed upon his eldest daughter education fitting not a submissive queen

but one who would rule. Alongside general household skills and 'womanly' pursuits of embroidery and needlework, she also learned history and arithmetic, she could speak Latin, ride a horse proficiently and hunt. She grew up in her grandfather William IX's court, surrounded by music, poetry, and most notably, courtly love. All this bred a girl who was lively, intelligent, confident and headstrong. These were not traits prized in ladies at the time, but they were essential for Eleanor, as she would soon become one of the most powerful heiresses in Europe.

Her only brother died in the spring of 1130, along with her mother. This left Eleanor as the heir presumptive of one of the largest domains in France, larger than those held even by the king. It would not take long for these kingdoms to fall into Eleanor's hands. In 1137, when Eleanor was aged approximately 15, her father went on pilgrimage and left his daughters in the care of the Archbishop of Bordeaux. However, on the journey home, he fell ill and died. Poitou and Aquitaine were

now clasped in the hands of a 15-year-old female heir.

All this control was a very dangerous thing for the young teenager to bear. Power-hungry men of the period were not above kidnapping eligible heiresses to seize their lands and claim a title. Eleanor's father knew this, and placed his daughter under the guardianship of King Louis VI of France, also known as Louis the Fat. William's will stipulated that Louis take care of his daughter and her lands until a suitable husband was found. Mortally ill and so obese he was confined to his bed, Louis was very aware of his own impending mortality and did not intend to waste this opportunity. Within hours, Louis arranged for Eleanor to be married to his son, Prince Louis, bringing her ample lands under the control of the French crown.

Louis the Fat married Eleanor off to his son confident in her suitability as a wife. Not only did she come with lands that greatly strengthened the French crown, she was also stunningly beautiful, young, fertile and a lady of court. However,

— CUT-OUT-AND-KEEP — GUIDE TO THE CRUSADES

From 1096 to 1291, Jerusalem was at the epicentre of a war that saw millions killed



1st **1096-99**
LEVANT, ANATOLIA
As Turkish forces gained control of the Holy Land, Pope Urban II called for a Crusade to eliminate the threat. Gradually the Christian forces reclaimed Jerusalem. They also began to set up Latin Christian states in the region.
Victors: Crusaders



2nd **1147-49**
IBERIA, HOLY LAND, EGYPT
When Edessa fell, Pope Eugene III encouraged the monarchies of France and Germany to wage war. However, both armies were defeated by the Turks amid claims the Byzantine emperor plotted against the Crusaders.
Victors: Muslims



3rd **1189-92**
LEVANT, ANATOLIA
After Jerusalem was conquered by Saladin, Richard I of England and King Philip II of France united to claim it back. They enjoyed a string of successes, notably in the cities of Acre and Jaffa, but failed to capture Jerusalem.
Victors: Mostly Crusaders



4th **1202-04**
BALKANS
With Jerusalem still under Muslim control, the Fourth Crusade was launched. Although the aim had been to claim Jerusalem, the Crusaders instead sacked Constantinople, beginning the decline of the Byzantine Empire.
Victors: Crusaders



5th **1213-21**
LEVANT, EGYPT
With Hungarian and Austrian armies failing to conquer Jerusalem, Flemish and Frisian forces attempt to claim Ayyubid and prevent the Crusaders having to fight on two fronts. The attack was repelled with huge Crusader losses.
Victors: Muslims



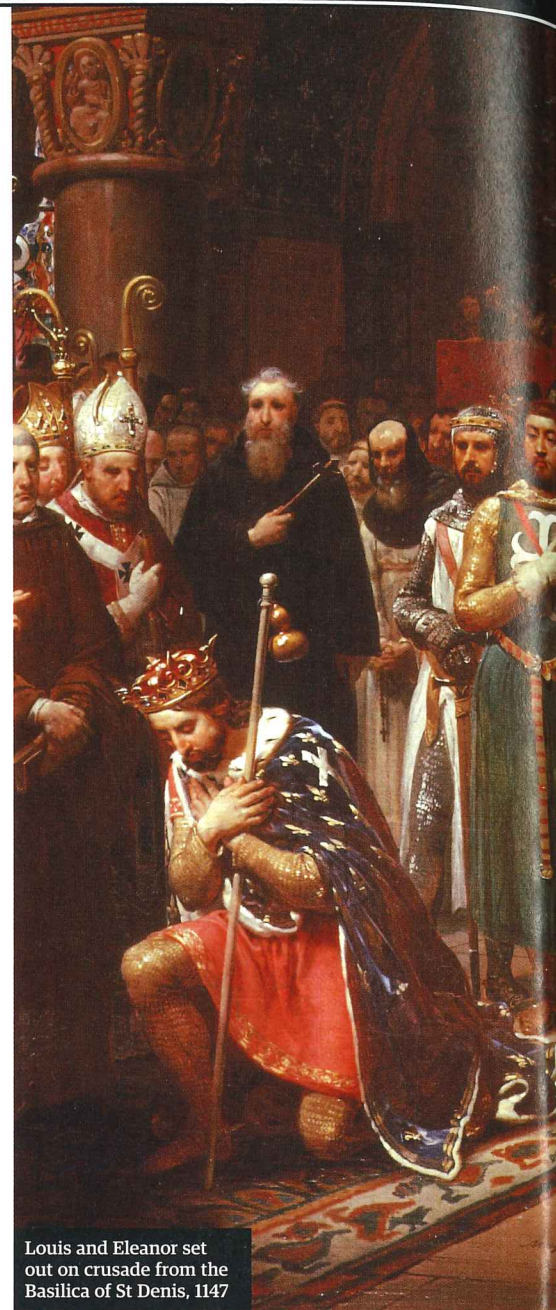
6th **1228-29**
CYPRUS, NEAR EAST
With the aim to reclaim Jerusalem, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II used diplomacy and lies to obtain Jerusalem in exchange for a ten-year truce with the Sultan of Egypt. Jerusalem was in Crusader hands.
Victors: Crusaders



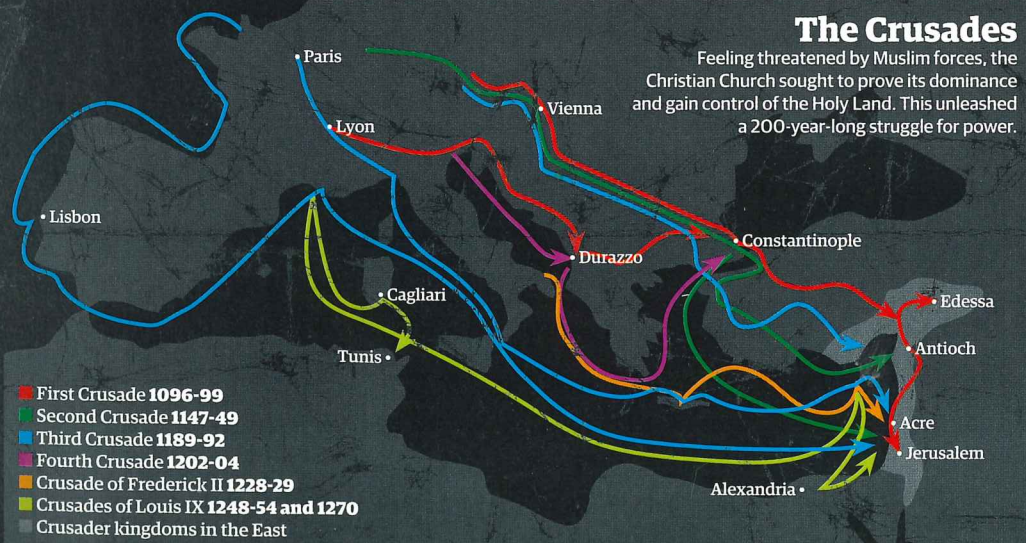
7th **1248-54**
AL-MANSOURAH, EGYPT
In 1244, Jerusalem returned to Muslim control, so Louis IX of France led a Crusade to get it back. Although they enjoyed initial success, the Crusader forces were defeated and Louis himself captured and ransomed.
Victors: Muslims



8th/_{9th} **1270-72**
TUNISIA, NEAR EAST
Louis IX launched a final attempt to reclaim the Holy Land, but became ill on the journey and died. This prompted Edward I to sail to Acre, where he enjoyed victories, but he was forced home to solve conflicts there.
Victors: Muslims



Louis and Eleanor set out on crusade from the Basilica of St Denis, 1147



ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE



Eleanor was anything but a quiet, submissive wife. Prince Louis was a very pious, meek man, a younger son intended originally for a monastic life, but Eleanor had been trained to rule. She had knowledge beyond her husband's, she was strong where he was weak, forceful where he was relenting, and he was completely and utterly besotted with her. As expected, Louis the Fat shortly died, the prince became King Louis VII and Eleanor became queen of the Franks. Her colourful and high-spirited nature was not well liked in the royal court, and Louis's own mother loathed her daughter in law, believing her to be a bad influence on her son. However, as much as Eleanor's unusual behaviour confused and infuriated the king, he could not resist bending to her every desire.

Sensitive and pious he may have been, but Louis was a king, and a king in the Medieval era could not avoid war. An illicit affair involving Eleanor's younger sister, Petronella, with Raoul I of Vermandois - then married to the daughter of the powerful Stephen of Blois - caused war to break out. With Eleanor's encouragement, Louis supported Petronella and Raoul, and in the resulting conflict, the king was responsible for the burning of the town of Vitry. The terrified townspeople sought refuge in a church, but it also burned to the ground and more than 1,000 people were lost in the flames. The event would have a profound effect on the sensitive Louis, who was plagued by his guilty conscience and the eternal screams of the dying.

“She had knowledge beyond her husband's, she was strong where he was weak”

What Louis needed was a pilgrimage to clear his conscience, and luckily for him, a trip to the Holy Land was just on the horizon, though it would not be quite as peaceful as he hoped. In the autumn of 1145, Pope Eugene III called upon Louis to lead a Crusade to protect the Crusader-owned kingdom of Jerusalem. The king obliged, but he would not be waging war alone.

Eleanor not only decided to join her husband on Crusade, but took up the Crusader cross with, likely, more enthusiasm than he himself. Aged 19, she offered the church the aid of her fighting vassals, which they were very happy to accept. However, they were less than pleased when she proclaimed that she, accompanied by 300 of her ladies in waiting, would join the Crusaders. Eleanor said that she and her ladies would help tend the wounded, but it is also likely that the headstrong queen was not so keen on her meek husband fighting a war without her. She appointed herself leader of her soldiers and departed with her husband.

The women were dressed in armour and carried lances, but did not fight. Nevertheless, the prospect of 300 women riding off with warriors was looked upon suspiciously by her contemporaries. However, Eleanor was not one to be swayed by criticism. Although the church may not have approved of her, when the army reached Constantinople, the warrior queen quickly impressed, and was compared to the mythical queen of the Amazons.

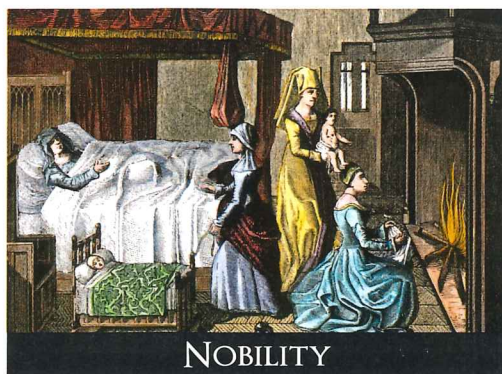
Unfortunately, the Crusade wasn't going quite so smoothly. The French had been informed by



The Second Crusade council: Conrad III, Louis VII & Baldwin III

— GROWING UP IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE —

Being born in the Middle Ages meant life was fated to follow a certain path



NOBILITY

Boys: Sons were sought after to continue the family name, and royal boys were especially prized. Noble boys began training to be a knight aged just seven, and those unsuitable were sent to monasteries. Popular boys toys were wooden soldiers, toy horses and whips.

Girls: Daughters were seen as expensive, as a dowry had to be paid to the groom at marriage, which could occur as young as seven. Generally noble girls were sent to train as ladies at a young age, learning how to weave, sing, play instruments and how to care for children.



PEASANTS

Boys: In poorer households, boys helped tend the fields and care for animals. Work was so consuming that children as young as two could be left alone. Poor children did not receive education apart from in the church, and few peasant boys knew how to read.

Girls: Female peasant children were expected to help their mothers with household chores. As they were working hard to mouth, toys were scarce and often hand made. Like their noble counterparts, peasant girls were married off as soon as they reached maturity.

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE

the Byzantine Emperor that their ally, the German King Conrad, had enjoyed victory against a Turkish army. However, as the French army continued their journey onwards, a dazed and ailing Conrad was found near their camp and revealed the truth. The Europeans hadn't won, in fact they had been massacred. It was with haste and some unease that the French and what remained of the German army headed to Antioch, where Eleanor's uncle ruled.

Little did the Crusaders know they were already being stalked by Turks. The French monarchs decided to split, with Louis at the rear of the column with the baggage trains and Eleanor at the front with her vassal, Geoffrey de Rancon. Although the vanguard was able to reach the summit where they planned to make camp, Rancon decided to continue onwards. The rear of the column, laden down with baggage, struggled to keep up and the Turks leapt on this opportunity. The French, including many unarmed pilgrims, were trapped and unprepared. Any who tried to escape were killed, and the king, disguised in simple pilgrim clothes, barely escaped the attack by scaling a rock.

The blame for the massacre was placed at de Rancon's feet, and, as he was Eleanor's vassal, so it was at her's. The fact that her own soldiers had marched in front and weren't involved did little to help her popularity, and it was even argued that the majority of the baggage was hers. Thus, despite having no involvement in the fight, the queen was blamed for the disaster. Tensions between the royal couple were reaching a fever pitch.

When the Crusaders reached the city of Antioch, it gave Eleanor an opportunity to renew her friendship with the lord of the city and her uncle, Raymond. Not only was Raymond close in age to Eleanor, but he was also tall, handsome and charming. In fact, she spent so much time with her uncle that rumours quickly spread about an illicit affair between the two. Raymond suggested they first capture Edessa, a strategic stronghold in the Holy Land, but Louis was determined to focus solely on Jerusalem. When Eleanor supported her uncle, it was the final straw - the meek, adoring and abiding king had reached his limit.

Louis, likely for the first time in his marriage, demanded that Eleanor follow him. His queen,

outraged, called into question the entire marriage, claiming that she and her husband were too closely related, and this was grounds for divorce. This didn't go down well with Louis, and in an effort to establish his authority, he took Eleanor away from her uncle and Antioch against her will and headed to Jerusalem. For the woman who was born to rule, to command and to control, this was humiliating beyond all measure. The remainder of the Crusade achieved little, Louis's subsequent assault on Damascus was a failure, and the royal couple returned to France in different ships.

A marriage where Eleanor was expected to be meek and obliging was not going to work. She could deal with her sensitive and generous husband, but the one that returned from the Crusade was as humiliated as her and increasingly suspicious of the growing relationship between niece and uncle.

Although they had children, no male heirs were born, and Louis faced increasing opposition to Eleanor from his barons. The king was left with no option, and in 1152, the marriage was annulled. The lands that Louis's father had so slyly secured for his son were torn away from him, and aged about 30, Eleanor once again became one of the most eligible and desirable heiresses in Europe.

However, Eleanor was no longer a naive 15-year-old, she was a worldly and knowledgeable woman. She knew she would have to remarry, and she intended to do so on her own terms. Amid several attempts of kidnap and forced marriage, she manufactured her own union with Henry, Duke of Normandy and future king of England. Henry wasn't stupid either; he travelled immediately

to visit Eleanor, and within eight weeks of her annulment to Louis, she was married to a man even more closely related to her than Louis.

On paper the union was a powerful one. In 1154, Henry became Henry II, king of England, and his lands combined with Eleanor's. This united England, Normandy and the West of France into a hugely powerful and influential kingdom. However, both Henry and Eleanor were strong, dominating characters. Henry was the eldest child; he too had been born to rule. He was used to getting his way and had an explosive and at times terrifying temper. Eleanor was 11 years older than him,



THE COURT OF LOVE

As well as a Crusader queen, Eleanor was an expert in the art of courtly love

In 1168, Henry II escorted Eleanor to the court of Poitiers, where she remained until 1173. Her time there would profoundly affect the culture of the period. Historians today still debate what exactly unfurled in this 'Court of Love', with some believing that Eleanor, her daughter Marie and other prominent women of the time presided over it as jury. They would listen to lovers' quarrels, resolve them, and seek answers to questions concerning love. 21 different cases have been recorded, debating issues such as whether true love can actually exist within a marriage, with the women concluding it was unlikely. The legend of this courtly love has evolved into the notion that Eleanor was responsible for bringing the ideas of chivalry and courtly love together. However, this is unlikely, as courtly love as a concept was already blossoming before Eleanor's court. It is more likely that the court at Poitiers popularised the idea of courtly love.



Eleanor was said to be "gracious, lovely, the embodiment of charm"



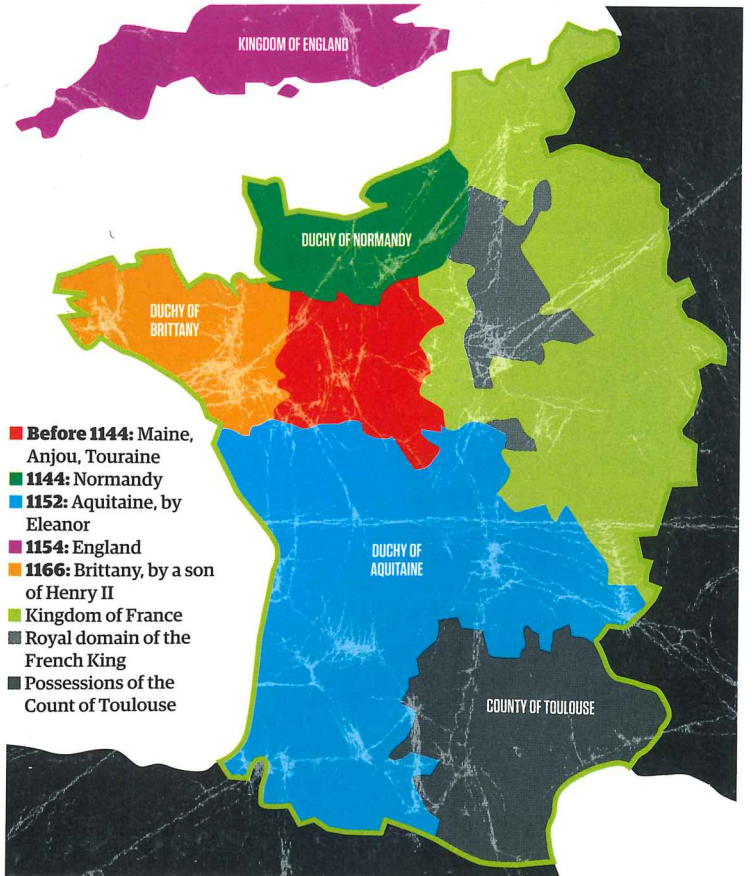
The marriage of Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine ended in annulment in 1152

A painting of the 'Last Crusader' returning home after the failure of the Ninth Crusade



EXPANSION OF THE ANGEVIN EMPIRE

When Henry, Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy, married Eleanor in 1152, Normandy, Anjou, Maine, Touraine, Aquitaine, Gascony, Poitou and Auvergne were brought together. When their son, Geoffrey, brought Brittany into the mix, the concentration of fiefs held by one man became a very real threat to the French monarchy.



Eleanor launched the Crusade from the rumoured location of Mary Magdalene's grave



10 MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN IN HISTORY

Powerful men fill the history books, but in every single era of history, women have also dominated and ruled



01

ELIZABETH I
1533-1603
QUEEN OF ENGLAND AND IRELAND

Crowning achievement: Defeating the Spanish Armada, greatly boosting national pride and putting a stop to Spain's invasion of England.
Did you know? Elizabeth's refusal to marry was so extraordinary for the period that many believed the only explanation was that she was secretly a man.



02

CATHERINE II
1729-96
EMPRESS AND AUTOCRAT OF ALL THE RUSSIAS

Crowning achievement: Catherine ruled over Russia for longer than any other female ruler, during which time she expanded the Russian Empire to the Black Sea and defeated the Ottoman Empire twice.
Did you know? Her name wasn't Catherine and she wasn't Russian. She was born as Sophia to an impoverished Prussian prince.



03

NEFERTITI 1370-1330 BCE
QUEEN CONSORT OF EGYPT

Crowning achievement: In the male-dominated world of Ancient Egypt, Nefertiti achieved near equal status with her husband, Pharaoh Akhenaten, and received the title 'Priest of Aten'.
Did you know? Nefertiti is known for the beautiful bust of her face, but CT scans have revealed that beneath lies a carving of a wrinkled woman with an uneven nose.



04

EMPERESS DOWAGER CIXI
1835-1908
EMPERESS DOWAGER OF QING CHINA

Crowning achievement: One of the most powerful women in China's long history, she was regent for her son and nephew, but held the real power for nearly 50 years.
Did you know? Her true nature is a mystery, with some painting her as a ruthless murderer and others an enlightened ruler.



05

BENAZIR BHUTTO 1953-2007
PRIME MINISTER OF PAKISTAN

Crowning achievement: Not only the first woman to head a major political party, but the first elected head of an Islamic country.
Did you know? She refused to change her name when she was married, stating: "Benazir Bhutto doesn't cease to exist the moment she gets married. I am not giving myself away. I belong to myself."



06

OPRAH WINFREY
1954-PRESENT
'QUEEN OF ALL MEDIA'

Crowning achievement: Born into poverty, Winfrey is now the most successful black philanthropist in American history and is regarded by many as the most influential woman in the world.
Did you know? Although she's one of the richest women in the world, growing up Oprah was bullied at school for wearing dresses made from potato sacks.



07

ISABELLA I OF CASTILE
1451-1504
QUEEN OF CASTILE AND LEÓN

Crowning achievement: She not only set up the unification of Spain with her marriage, but also cleared her kingdom of the crippling debt left by her brother.
Did you know? One of Isabella's daughters was Catherine of Aragon, none other than Henry VIII's first wife.



08

BOUDICA
UNKNOWN-C. 61 CE
QUEEN OF THE ICENI TRIBE

Crowning achievement: Uniting many British tribes to revolt against the occupying Roman army, she led her force to defeat the Romans in three battles.
Did you know? It wasn't until the Victorian Era that Boudica earned legendary status, as hers and Victoria's name were identical in meaning.



09

ANGELA MERKEL
1954-PRESENT
CHANCELLOR OF GERMANY

Crowning achievement: As well as being the first woman to serve in her position, she is known as the 'decider' in her handling of the financial crisis and is also viewed as the de facto leader of the EU.
Did you know? She has been named most powerful woman in the world by *Forbes* magazine nine years running.



10

QUEEN VICTORIA
1819-1901
QUEEN OF THE UNITED KINGDOM, EMPRESS OF INDIA

Crowning achievement: Victoria ruled over the biggest empire in the history of the world, spanning six continents and 458 million people.
Did you know? Despite her imposing presence, Victoria was barely five foot tall.

Eleanor's effigy can still be seen in Fontevraud Abbey in France

“A marriage where Eleanor was expected to be meek and obliging was not going to work”

knew her worth, and wasn't prepared to obey the commands of a domineering husband. Despite their stormy relationship, the couple had five sons and three daughters, and ruled over an impressive Medieval empire.

However, a storm was brewing. Henry was ruled by passion, and this led to many illicit affairs and a number of mistresses. His affair with one mistress in particular, Rosamund Clifford, became public knowledge and drove his proud and headstrong wife to breaking point. Eleanor departed for her native land of Aquitaine and took several of her children, including Richard, her chosen heir, with

her. The queen was tired of dealing with the wills of husbands; she wanted to rule Aquitaine, and she wanted to rule alone.

Eleanor wasn't the only one who had been pushed to the limit by Henry. Several of her sons had inherited her proud, stubborn nature and decided that enough was enough. Henry the younger secretly travelled to Aquitaine and, likely encouraged by Eleanor, joined with two of his brothers, Richard and Geoffrey. Together they decided to rebel against their father. For Eleanor the rebellion was the culmination of years of abiding his infidelities, bearing his children and a lifetime of sharing power; it was her chance to rule Aquitaine with her beloved son Richard. But, as always with Eleanor, fate did not run smooth. The rebellion was squashed, and the woman born to rule was thrown in prison.

For the next 16 years Eleanor was imprisoned in England. If the humiliation wasn't bad enough, the lack of contact with her sons over the years caused Eleanor to become distanced from them. Now aged 50, Eleanor hopelessly and powerlessly waited for her chance to rule again. It would take the death of her tempestuous husband for her to finally glimpse freedom once more.

When Henry died in 1189, Richard I became heir. Although Eleanor's favourite son had become more distant, one of his first acts was to release his mother from prison. In the autumn of her life, Eleanor could finally fulfil the role she was born

to play - ruler. While Richard, who would become known as Richard the Lionheart, travelled and embarked on the Third Crusade, she ruled England as regent. She defended his lands, and even used her political acumen to negotiate Richard's release when he was captured. Her citizens approved of their able, intelligent and strong queen, and, although it was likely no concern to her, Eleanor finally earned popularity.

The queen was not one to let old age stop her. She continually travelled across Europe, cementing powerful marriages for her brood of children, managing her army and building a strong and influential empire. At the age of 70, she rode over the Pyrenees to collect her choice of wife for Richard, then continued to traverse the Alps. She would outlive nearly all of her children, and survived long into the reign of her youngest son, John. However, determined as she was, Eleanor could not avoid time catching up with her. She retired to the religious house of Fontevraud where she became a nun. In 1204, aged 82, Eleanor died and was buried beside the son she adored, Richard. Her legacy would continue not only in the children she bore, but in her lands, which remained loyal to England even after the loss of Normandy. Though many were quick to discount her for her frivolity in her youth, she had proved herself an intelligent, driven and wise ruler. As the nuns who spent her final years with her wrote, she was a queen “who surpassed almost all the queens of the world.”

