The Power of Medieval Queenship: Eleanor of Aquitaine and Blanche of Castile

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When the image of the Middle Ages comes to mind, one thinks of powerful kings and their queens. One does not, however, usually associate power with medieval queens. The kings flew into battle, commanding troops, and making laws; the queens stayed at home raising the children and providing an heir. According to Ralph V. Turner, "A noble lady's main function was to produce offspring, to ensure the line's continuity."[1] In popular knowledge, kings possess power, maintaining order in their kingdom; queens stay out of politics. While most queens are not mentioned in documents from the Middle Ages, it has been discovered that medieval queens did not all stay out of politics [2]

Two examples of this political engagement are Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine and Queen Blanche of Castile. These women gained great amounts of power during their lifetimes. Power, as discussed here, refers to the authority they possessed and the influence they had over those in authority positions, politics, the military, their subjects, and their children. Anne Duggan states the fact that though a queen's "role in the government and in the state was different from that of kings and emperors, [it] does not cancel out the fact that they played an important part in the maintenance of dynastic rule, in the cultivation of the arts, and in the maintenance of the memoria of their families."[3] Just because queens did not have the same role as kings in political affairs did not mean they had no power. They could not be a part of the political hierarchy, made up solely of males, but they could exercise influence and authority over political and clerical power due to the status of queen.[4]

Blanche of Castile and Eleanor of Aquitaine gained vast prestige while among the rulers of western medieval Europe; most people throughout western Europe knew the names of these dynamic queens of England and France. Besides holding the position of queen, these women were the mothers of great kings of both England and France. Throughout the reigns of their sons, they held authority and influence over the new kings and their citizens. By comparing Eleanor of Aquitaine with Blanche of Castile, one is able to see the influence a strong queen and mother could have over her sons and the empire and power she could gain from this.

Eleanor of Aquitaine was a very determined and strong-willed medieval woman. She demonstrated this throughout her life, especially through her marriages and during her widowhood. "If a prize were to be given for England's liveliest queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine would undoubtedly win," writes Petronelle Cook. "From the moment she kicked her way into the world in 1122 she was a ball of fire that never stopped rolling."[5] While married, Eleanor presented her strong will through her resolve to join the Second Crusade with her husband Louis VII, king of France.[6] With this crusade, marital problems arose between the king and queen of France, resulting in divorce.[7] She also showed her fiery spirit in her second marriage to Henry II, king of England. During this marriage she maintained control of her territories in France, not allowing them to amalgamate into those domains England held in France at the time, at least in the beginning.[8] Eleanor demonstrates herself as a strong queen throughout her regency while her husband Henry II was overseas; she managed her own holdings in France along with England during this time.[9] In the course of her marriage to the king of France, Eleanor of Aquitaine used her own seal as duchess of Aquitaine, not as queen of France, while dealing with matters that involved Aquitaine.[10] She also employs this seal during her marriage to Henry II.

Eleanor's power during her marriage to Henry II increased around 1173 when she gives her blessing and military support to her sons in an attempt to overthrow their father.[11] This revolt was sparked by Henry II withholding power from them.[12] After giving her blessing to the three

men, they arrive in the court of Louis VII, who encourages their revolt.[13] Not only did Eleanor support their cause, she inspired and incited it, according to Ralph Turner, who sees her as manipulating her sons due to her loss of influence over the country and politics.[14] Turner presents good sources to back his theories, though her active role in the revolt was virtually inconceivable to her contemporaries.[15] In a letter addressed to Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine from Peter of Blois in 1173, one can infer her influence:

> Against all women and out of childish counsel, you provoke disaster for the lord king, to whom powerful kings bow the neck. And so, before this matter reaches a bad end, you should return with your sons to your husband, whom you have promised to obey and live with. Turn back so that neither you nor your sons become suspect. We are certain that he will show you every possible kindness and the surest guarantee of safety.[16]

Peter of Blois wrote this letter upon request from Rotrou, the Archbishop of Rouen, at the requisition of one of Henry's men. Throughout the letter, one gains a sense of a religious influence; this is a religious man telling a secular queen what she should do and criticizing her. It does not seem as if she sought out his help, because the letter at times seems to be attacking the queen's decisions. The archbishop became upset that she left Henry and went against him, allowing her sons to rebel, prompting him to have this letter commissioned and sent to the queen of England.

Later in this letter, Peter of Blois informs us of Eleanor's influence over her sons by stating: "I beg you, advise your sons to be obedient and respectful to their father."[17] His request for her to persuade her sons to honor their father instead of revolting against him validates her authority and acknowledges that her influence is known by the Church. Turner points this out in stating that the "dysfunctional character of the family life of Eleanor of Aquitaine, Henry II, and their sons was no secret to their contemporaries."[18] He suggests that she reinforced her dominance over her sons through solid ties of affection. The sway Eleanor held over her sons transcended her time as queen of England reigning beside Henry II; it continued into her sons' own reigns.

Eleanor of Aquitaine became most politically active during her widowhood during the reigns of her sons. In the time between Henry II's death and Richard I's return to England, she seemed to govern England by herself, forcing the free people of England to swear oaths of allegiance to Richard.[19] Elizabeth A.R. Brown suggests this as foreshadowing of the influence Eleanor will have on Richard's reign.[20] She helped Richard I secure the domains of England and, while Richard remained in captivity and on crusade between 1190 and 1194, she protected his authority over England and its territories.[21] After his death in 1199, she became actively involved in claiming her son John's right to rule England as king.[22] Her involvement exceeded those of most women of her age and rank; this involvement allowed the English people to once again accept her, enabling her to wield political power, and even ride into combat, without question.[23] This enables one to observe why some scholars, such as Elizabeth A. R. Brown and Ralph V. Turner, believed she used her children to gain political power.[24] This also raises the point of the involvement of the king's mother in the governance of medieval England. According to Rágena C. DeAragon, Henry II's mother Matilda "maintained some authority and regal presence in Normandy during her son's reign," and she allowed Henry to retain political authority over the rest of the English territories.[25] Like her mother-in-law, Eleanor became heavily involved in the governance of England.

According to Turner, Eleanor's favorite son was Richard.[26] She had the greatest hold over him. She maintained such a great amount of authority and influence during his reign that some claim she "ruled England in all but name."[27] During his time as king of England, Eleanor of Aquitaine heavily influenced her son Richard. Turner cites the chronicler Ralph Diceto, who claimed that Richard I gave Eleanor the power of regent at one point in his reign.[28] Turner also maintains that Eleanor had great power during the period of Richard's captivity, from 1190 to 1194.[29] Before leaving on the Third Crusade, Richard I set up a plan for governing England while away; it was, however, flawed as the bishop in charge, William Longchamp, who also happened to be chancellor, focused the power on his own lands.[30] Turner states, "Eleanor's role and her effectiveness during the resulting crises can refute any notion that she was 'merely a royal figurehead' for the competent professional clerks and household knights who staffed the Angevin royal administration."[31] Longchamp was ineffective especially because he lacked the respect of English nobles due to his status as a foreigner.[32] Besides Longchamp, Count John presented another problem to this absentee governance in his attacks against England. The archbishop of Rouen, Walter of Coutances, arrived in England to mediate between John and Longchamp to make peace in England.[33] With Eleanor's backing, he was able to govern England until

Richard I returned.[34] This exhibits the influence Eleanor had over the English. Without her support, Walter would have been ineffective, with other nobles rebelling or acting out against him, as John had. By March of 1192, Eleanor forced William Longchamp to leave England on threat of arrest, demonstrating her authority in the absence of Richard.[35]

Eleanor played her greatest role as queen-mother during Richard's imprisonment. Based on their relationship, she assumed a position of direct authority early in 1193 upon receiving news of his capture.[36] During this period, she wrote three letters to the pope, Celestine III, concerning Richard's imprisonment by the German king. In one she states, "Two sons remain to my solace, who today survive to punish me, miserable and condemned. King Richard is held in chains. His brother, John, depletes his kingdom with iron [sword] and lays it waste with fire."[37] In this letter she reveals to the pope Richard's captivity and John's betrayal of his country. Throughout the letter, one observes the grief these unfolding events caused the queen as she pleads for papal aid in the emancipation of her son. She criticizes the church as well in this letter because it will not send help, citing Anacharsis's metaphor of cannon law being akin to a spider's webs, "which retain weaker animals but let the strong pass through."[38] She relates Richard to the weak animals trapped in the web; Eleanor became actively involved in the church, as well as the English government, during this time.[39] After raising the ransom for Richard, Eleanor rides to free Richard from his captivity, though they leave quickly as she suspects that Phillip II, who had Richard imprisoned, will change his mind and have the emperor, who held Richard and whom she intimidates, hold him regardless.[40] Even at the age of seventy-three Eleanor remained involved in the military and government. After restoring the kingdom and Richard to power, Eleanor reconciled her sons and settled at the abbey of Fontevraud, a pseudo-retirement for the time being.[41]

Though her high point of political power came during Richard I's reign, she still continued to be active in John's reign; in fact, this became the busiest time in her life. After Richard I's death in 1199, Eleanor withdrew from her retirement to fight for John's right to be king of England.[42] John became king "largely through his mother's efforts."[43] She backed him instead of her grandson by Geoffrey, Arthur of Brittany, as the rightful heir to the crown due to her distrust of Geoffrey's Breton wife Constance, who desired to end the Plantagenet hold over the Bretons.[44] John becoming king over Arthur, who had originally been named heir, with her backing shows the pull she had with others in England at the time. After returning from his first crusade, Richard acknowledged John as his heir.[45] To ensure his succession, Eleanor gained support from her domains of Poitou, Anjou, and Aquitaine while John strengthened his grasp on the Anglo-Norman empire.[46] Eleanor navigated Aquitaine to gain support for John because, unlike Richard I, he had no claim in his mother's duchy. She entered into contracts with towns from Poitou, granting charters and confirming their rights in return for their support.[47] According to Turner, Eleanor issued more than sixty charters between Richard's death in 1199 and her own in 1204, a significant number for any medieval woman.[48] She would have employed the use of her seal on these charters to strengthen the authority of them.[49] Once John officially became king, she signed Poitou, and most likely Aquitaine, to John during a visit to his court in Rouen.[50] When all was well, she retired once again to Fontevraud.

This retirement did not last long, however. John's poor judgment caused Eleanor to reenter the world of politics.[51] He chose to marry Isabelle of Angoulême, the betrothed of Hugh IX of La Marche, instead of his own betrothed Isabelle of Gloucester.[52] Hugh IX was the head of the Lusignan clan of Poitou, a rebellious group. In marrying Hugh IX's betrothed, John created great discord among nobles of the region.[53] These men then turned to Phillip II of France, who had finally lessened attacks on England. This new conflict created by John opened up an avenue of attack for Phillip II and Arthur of Brittany. Eleanor stepped in to fight for the salvation of Anjou and Aquitaine from invaders because John was not up to the task of fighting the invaders; he was not the best of warriors.[54] Many women would have retired by the time they were Eleanor's age, but she continued to fight and be involved in the affairs of the state. Eleanor issued many charters to solidify Aquitaine's support for John.[55] Once this was secured, she, as the intermediary for John, focused her efforts on gaining the support of the viscount of Thouars, one of the most powerful Poitevin nobles.[56] In 1200 she wrote to John about steps she and Guy de Dives, Constable of Auvergne, took to ensure the faithfulness of Viscount Thouars. She states:

> He listened and at the same time understood your words…he freely and willingly conceded that he and his lands and castles were from now on at your command and will, whatever he might have done before: And his friends, and others, who had seised [sic] [taken possession of] the land and your castles without your permission…he will oppose them with all his power as much as you possessed.[57]

She gained the support of one of the most powerful Poitevin nobles. Guy de Dives arrived at Fontevraud for this negotiation due to her illness at the time. Though not well, she still harbored the great influence and authority she had throughout her widowhood. Eventually, the French king acknowledged John as his vassal, as he had lands in France, resulting in John's ultimate loss of the region of Normandy in the conflict that ensued.[58] Phillip then named Arthur heir of Aquitaine.[59]

John realized he could not have successfully ruled without his mother. He realized this when the French took her prisoner. She was captured at Mirabeau and John, knowing he could not win in the fight against invaders without her, rescued his mother. She left the safety of Fontevraud to travel to Poitou in 1202 at the age of eighty years old in an attempt to save her lands from Arthur of Brittany.[60] She rested at Mirabeau Castle and was attacked by Arthur's armies and allies and taken hostage.[61] Upon hearing of his mother's situation, John rushed to her, surprising her jailers. He took many hostages, including Arthur of Brittany and the Lusignan brothers.[62] Eleanor's involvement in the governance of her own lands, as well as England, continued until her death. John rushed to her aid, signifying his need for her to overcome these aggressors. Her active involvement allowed John to remain king.

Blanche of Castile provides another excellent example of a medieval queen who, like Eleanor of Aquitaine, involved herself in all aspects of royal authority. Margaret Wade Labarge, author of *Saint Louis: Louis IX, Most Christian King of France*, calls Blanche "the wisest of all women of her time" and that "all good things came to the realm of France while she was alive."[63] During her time in a position of authority, Blanche retained her domains and kept the peace. She even fought alongside her son to preserve this tranquility. Through Blanche's determination, she kept France strong while its king remained underage, too young to rule. After he came of age, she continued to be fueled by this determination and aided her son in his reign.

After her husband Louis VIII's death, Blanche's son, a minor, was crowned king of France as Louis IX. She secured his right to the crown at his coronation on November 29, 1226.[64] Because of his youth, Blanche became regent of France and Louis's guardian until he came of age.[65] Many nobles disagreed with the choice of an underage king whose mother claimed the title of regent. Furthermore, in his chronicle *The Life of Saint Louis*, Jean de Joinville reveals the queen's foreign background; she therefore did not have many relations or friends to support her in France, another initiator of discord.[66] This caused many revolts and rebellions among the nobles against the ruling family;[67] they desired to test her by making demands of her for large land holdings and when she did not yield to these demands, they joined together against her.[68] She brought these rebellions down, ending some with the Treaty of Vendôme.[69] At one point, she took her son and the army to attack Count Peter Mauclerc, one of the rebellions nobles; she exercised military power during her regency.[70] Blanche used marriages to strengthen the relationship of the counties of Brittany and La Marche, who had been among those unhappy nobles, with the king.[71] Her domination also encompassed the church. When bishops attempted to intrude on secular jurisdiction, she jumped into action. Eventually, they would have to consult with her before issuing excommunications due to conflicts they created.[72]

While she remained regent, Pope Gregory IX wrote a letter to her requesting her help to preserve Constantinople against the Greeks. In this document, he informs the queen that the rewards she would receive would be the same as if she had been on crusade herself. He pleads "we entreat the royal serenity by apostolic letters to send suitable fighters or other appropriate aid in support of the empire."[73] During her regency, Blanche of Castile held great power and prestige. Because of this, her help was sought by many, despite her status as female. In opposition to what many modern people believe about the medieval epoch, queens did have great authority. Through the entreaties of the Church for military support, one can see this. The pope writes "we assiduously entreat your highness again that you not delay to help that empire."[74] France's strong army, led by Blanche, could help the Church preserve Constantinople.

When Louis IX came of age and became full king of France, Blanche remained a major influence, though no longer regent. Blanche's influence persisted so much so that chroniclers could not distinguish between her reign and her son's; their authorities were greatly intertwined.[75] In both her own and her son's reign, she led the army alongside Louis IX many times;[76] the duo suppressed several minor revolts in Poitou and Languedoc.[77] Blanche of Castile became regent of France while her son Louis IX reigned, and she continued to influence him, illustrating the great power she held over this French king as his mother. Blanche became regent of France once again when Louis IX and his wife decided to go on a crusade.[78] The nobles realized the futility of their rebellions, making this regency easier for Blanche.[79]

During her second regency, the queen received a letter from King Henry III of England in 1252 in which

negotiations to mend breaches in a truce between the two countries were planned. He asked Blanche to set a date on which she will make amends on behalf of her son, who, at this time, remained on crusade. Henry III states:

> We have learned by frequent notification of our people from Gascony that the truces long established between the illustrious king of France and us are little observed, since on the part of said king many breaches have been made at the time of said truces, to amend which when you have often been requested by our people, you answered that you would do so as might be fitting.[80]

Due to her status as regent, she had the authority to make decisions and political moves on behalf of the king; she essentially had the power of a king. Henry III desired amends for breaches in the truce made between himself and Louis IX, but Louis led his troops in the crusade at this time and therefore was not available. He turned to the regent of France, Blanche of Castile. Her experience as queen and as regent before her son took control provided her the ability to make well-informed decisions on behalf of her son.

In the eyes of nobles and others high in rank she held more power than her son. She received reports, unbeknownst to her son due to the fact that they were addressed solely to her and not him, on the subject of "political intrigues and conduct of war against the rebellious barons, as well as special requests from the pope and other rulers."[81] These continued until after her death in November of 1252 before Louis IX and his wife returned from crusade.[82] Henry III in 1229 sent a letter with one of these messages. In this letter, he informs Blanche and Louis that he has sent envoys to negotiate a truce between the two countries. This letter was sent to Louis, but the last sentence, reserved for Blanche, states "And we have made this known to you."[83] This secret line presents the case of Blanche remaining influential during her son's reign. At the end of another letter written by King Henry III of England, he wrote, "And we make this known to you asking that you have them admitted for this by the aforesaid lord king, your son."[84] The letter arrived during Louis' reign as king, before his mother became regent once again, demonstrating the authority the king of England felt she had regardless whether or not she was regent. The significance behind this final line from King Henry III of England allows one to observe the influence others believed Blanche held over her son, the king of France. This great influence allowed her to remain an authority figure in the eyes of all.

Both Blanche of Castile and Eleanor of Aquitaine took the initiative to arrange marriages for their sons, demonstrating the influence of these mothers. While their sons ruled, these two women remained queen even after their sons married. According to Cook, Richard I "never even offered to have Berengaria [his wife] crowned beside him. For there was only one Queen [sic] of England—his mother."[85] This is significant in the study of the authority and influence of these queens due to the fact that the kings' wives were not actually queen—their mothers were; Blanche and Eleanor became queen-regnant of France and England respectively. These women used marriage for political reasons. Eleanor of Aquitaine even married Blanche of Castile, her granddaughter, to Philip Augustus' son and heir Louis to make peace with France.[86] Eleanor went to Castile at the age of 80 to retrieve her granddaughter, showing the importance of mending relations with Spain.[87] Blanche herself employed this use of marriage during her regencies to mend ties with the counts of Brittany and La Marche.[88] In John's marriage, Eleanor did not choose Isabelle of Angoulême, but Isabelle never became queen until after the death of Eleanor. According to Ralph V. Turner, "she [Eleanor] took precedence over their [her sons'] wives, enjoying the prerequisites of a queen-regnant."[89] She had no intention of relinquishing her political authority. In his article "Eleanor of Aquitaine and Her Children: An Inquiry into Medieval Family Attachment," Turner presents Eleanor in context of the medieval family. In her tomb effigy, Eleanor represented herself as the "Anglie regina" even though her sons' wives were entitled to this designation, illustrating her desire to remain queen.[90]

Besides choosing Louis's wife and remaining queen herself, Blanche of Castile attempted to keep her son and daughter-in-law, Marguerite, separate during the day because she felt, according to Labarge, the only function of this woman was to produce an heir.[91] She wished to remain in power and so separated Marguerite from her husband while he dealt with politics. Louis' deepest affection was reserved for his mother, so he allowed her to remain queen while his wife, against her will, sat back and watched.[92] Louis's wife Marguerite was like Blanche in that she desired involvement in her husband's work.[93] Labarge states, "Marguerite was never regent, was never given political power, to her sorrow."[94] This woman desired to be a part of the politics and ruling of France. Labarge goes on to say that Blanche resented anyone who could take away her authority, her title as queen.[95] Labarge uses sufficient sources to make a compelling argument about both Louis IX and his mother

Figure 1: Seal of Blanche of Castile, from Kathleen Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 153.

Figure 2: Seal of Eleanor of Aquitaine, from Kathleen Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 82.

Blanche of Castile. One could conclude that these women chose the wives of their powerful sons so that they could remain in power themselves. If these mothers could influence whom their children married, they could influence much more.

Both Blanche of Castile and Eleanor of Aquitaine exhibited their power, authority, and influence through their seals. Seals were generally reserved for the use of widows and men. They indicated wealth, power, and authority, in addition to sociocultural importance.[96] In affairs dealing with Aquitaine, Eleanor utilized her seal as duchess of Aquitaine while queen of both France and England.[97] Because seals were usually reserved for widows, Eleanor's employment of them while still married demonstrates her authority. While in her second regency, when Louis IX was on crusade, Blanche employed the use of her own seal, her right as regent of France.[98] The use of her own personal seal instead of Louis's demonstrates the great authority this queen held. Women's seals, like those of the clergy, laymen, and merchants, generally had an oval shape.[99] The figures usually stood holding a scepter with a *fleur-de-lys* at the top.[100] In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, seals began emphasizing lineage and marriage alliances through heraldry symbols.[101] Blanche of Castile's seal, which is known through wax imprints, contains the image of an erect, crowned woman surrounded by lettering declaring her title (see figure 1).[102] Eleanor, on her seal as Duchess of Aquitaine, is illustrated as standing with a bare head, wearing no veil and having short hair, in the Anglo-Norman style (see figure 2).[103] In her seal as queen of England, Eleanor is veiled and wearing a crown (see figure 3). These two seals could, however, be the same but in different states of preservation.[104] Eleanor's seal as queen of France is lost. The standard pattern in which queens were depicted in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries included the figure of a woman standing holding a scepter in one hand topped with a *fleur-de-lys,* denoting authority.[105] Also, the figure held cords against her heart, illustrating "sincerity, acceptance, and 'intériorité,'"[106] or a relationship with one's soul, as well as

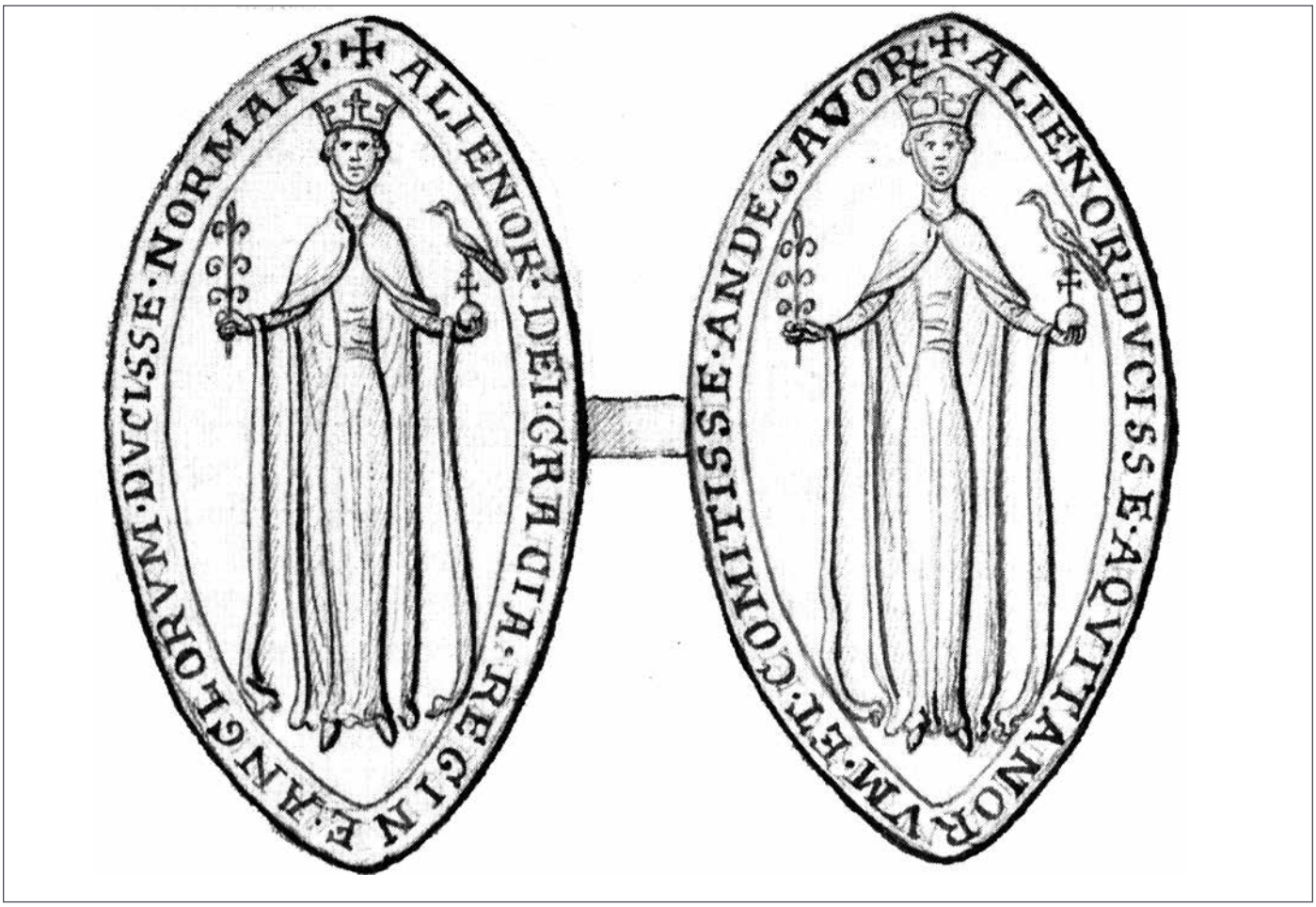

Figure 3: Seal of Eleanor of Aquitaine, from Kathleen Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 84

the authority a noble possessed.[107] The images on the seals presented a representation of the queen's authority.

Blanche's seal represents her as mediator to the king; she had the ability to influence the king's decisions.[108] Blanche also became the first Capetian queen to utilize a counterseal, or a second seal imprinted on the other side of the wax ornament.[109] By Blanche's time, the counterseal represented imperial identity.[110] Her counterseal held the symbols of Castile, the castle, with a pair of *fleur-de-lys* on either side of the castle (see figure 4).[111] These two seals balance one another—her seal emphasizes her authority in France as queen while her counterseal represents her natal heritage.[112] Eleanor as well had a two-sided seal as queen of England.[113] Hers is the first Anglo-Norman seal of a queen, known today, to be double-sided.[114] The front of her seal claims the titles queen of England and duchess of the Normans; the back claims her titles as duchess of Aquitaine and countess of Anjou.[115]

Both of the seals of these two women proclaim titles they received through marriage as well as claims to their natal lands. Eleanor of Aquitaine's seal as queen greatly accentuates her position as an Anglo-Norman queen,[116] as it echoes those of Henry I, Stephen, and Henry II through the depiction of an orb topped with a cross and a bird.[117] These symbols were attached to male monarchs. Eleanor's use of these images allows her to place herself among the kings; her authority becomes one like that of the English kings before her. Nolan states, "the semiotic impact of a double, oval, and hence female, seal must have made powerful claims of authority."[118] Eleanor presents her authority through the image on her seal, as well as her use of it. Seals illustrated the authority of a medieval person. The imagery presented in a seal connected the user to one's lineage, both natal and through marriage. Queens using seals would have demonstrated great authority by claiming a male privilege.[119] In claiming this, these women presented themselves as strong, independent, authoritative, and influential.

Another way one could claim power was through tombs. Blanche of Castile claimed power in death. She

Figure 4: Seal of Blanche of Castile, from Kathleen Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 156.

commissioned and designed the tombs of her children, grandchildren, and eventually her own, but not her husband's or her son Louis IX's.[120] Kathleen Nolan suggests Blanche participated more actively in decisions regarding burials than most men and women, with the exception of her son.[121] Her tomb at Maubuisson was destroyed in the French Revolution, but modern drawings of it exist (see figure 5).[122] She created the tombs of her children and grandchildren out of stone and metalwork.[123] Her own tomb most likely consisted of elaborate metalwork and stone.[124] Like Eleanor of Aquitaine, Blanche attempted to create a family necropolis at Royaumont, with all the royal children being buried there, though she herself chose to be buried in both Maubuisson and Le Lys.[125] This would not have taken, because a French royal necropolis already existed at the Basilica of Saint Denis. Blanche of Castile became the first queen and the first French monarch to practice the partition of the body.[126] She took great interest in her depiction, employing the visual formula for queenship in her design. She wears a crown as well as a nun's habit in her effigy.[127]

Eleanor also claimed power through funerary art. After the death of Henry II, Eleanor was finally released from her fifteen-year imprisonment by her now-deceased husband for aiding her sons in their revolt against Henry II. She then chose the abbey of Fontevraud for her retirement because of ancestral ties that connected her to this abbey.[128] "Eleanor chose Fontevraud as a base that reflected her political identity, and she enhanced her spiritual authority through her ties to the nuns, whose prayers might ensure the eventual repose of her family's soul and her own."[129] Eleanor's involvement in the politics of her day lasted until soon before her death. Her last act was John's rescue of her at Mirabeau. "Triumphant but exhausted, she retired to the monastery at Fontevraud, Anjou, where she died in 1204."[130] After this time, she retired to Fontevraud and began overseeing the designing and planning of the tomb effigies of both Richard I and Henry II, as well as her own.[131]

Significantly, in 1185, Eleanor of Aquitaine wrote a letter to the archbishop of Bordeaux, donating one hundred pounds "in perpetual alms" to the abbey of Fontevraud.[132] In this letter she states she gave these alms from the "provosture of Poitiers and the vineyard of Benon." Her reasons for the donation follow: "I made this donation and alms for the salvation of the soul of my lord king and the salvation of my soul and of my son Richard and and [sic] my other sons and my daughters and my ancestors."[133] The donations made by the royal family to this specific abbey illustrate the importance of life after death and the importance of the prayers of those still alive. Before their death, many medieval people purchased prayers from the church to aid their soul and the souls of their family members after death.[134] Eleanor herself continued to make donations to the abbey throughout her life, but especially after the death of Henry II, to gain prayers for her soul, and those of her family, to remain at rest after death.

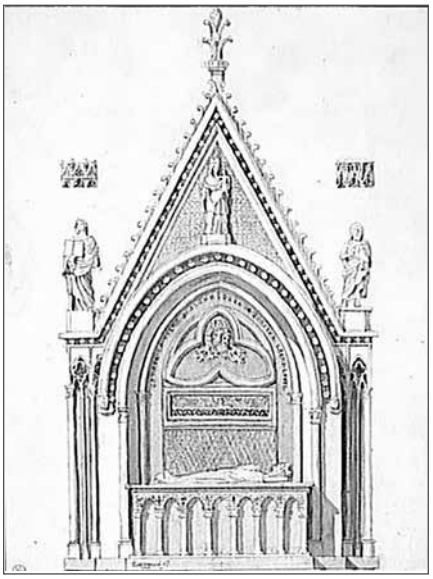

Figure 5: Drawing of the tomb of Blanche of Castile, from Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 6 (left): The tomb of Henry II, from Wikipedia Commons. **Figure 7** (right): The tomb of Eleanor of Aquitaine, from Wikimedia Commons.

Henry II chose to be buried in Grandmont, in the diocese of Limoges,[135] but his tomb rests in Fontevraud.[136] Elizabeth A. R. Brown suggests it was out of convenience that he was buried at Fontevraud, while Alain Erlande-Brandenburg proposes it "as a way to cement Henry's political claims to territories north and south of Fontevraud."[137] Some scholars have suggested that Eleanor chose this resting spot for the former king in retaliation for the years he imprisoned her.[138] The authority needed to contradict the desire of the king to be buried in Grandmont rather than Fontevraud would be considerable. Eleanor had this power, though she did not actually choose this site for his burial, according to Kathleen Nolan in the article "The Queen's Choice: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Tombs at Fontevraud." Nolan presents an argument placing Eleanor in the context of aristocratic women of her time. She provides many scholars and their points of view on the subject matter. She also presents images of the tombs themselves, and of others, and the space in which they rest. According to Nolan, Eleanor had remained in England when her husband died and therefore could not have instructed where he was to be buried. Richard I, contrary to his father, chose Fontevraud as his burial site, wishing to be near his father.[139] According to another article written by Nolan, focusing on placing Eleanor of Aquitaine in context with her contemporaries through seals and tombs, Henry II died near Fontevraud and William Marshal made the decision to bury him in the abbey.[140] Fontevraud became a necropolis for this family, with Henry II, Richard I, Eleanor, John's wife Isabelle of Angoulême, Eleanor's daughter Joanna, and Joanna's son Raymond VII all buried in the abbey.[141]

Queens and daughters generally commissioned tombs for themselves and their family members.[142] The tombs, those of Henry II, Richard I, and Eleanor of Aquitaine, are quite interesting in that they "impersonate living beings in their scale and three-dimensionality," according to Nolan.[143] They also represent a pivotal moment in the art of tomb sculptures. Henry II's, Richard I's, and Eleanor's tombs are amid the first full sculpture effigies of contemporary monarchs.[144] Eleanor of Aquitaine is believed to have designed the tomb effigies of Henry II, Richard I, and her own. This presents a new power, one "outside modern notions."[145] Power over the image that represents one after death was quite important; this power was potent. Eleanor exercised her authority to manipulate the imagery of her husband in his death.[146] One can discern that she designed and commissioned these tombs by observing the styles and how each of the dead kings was represented.

Another way in which it is possible to infer that Eleanor designed and commissioned these effigies is how the men, in contrast to her, are depicted in their effigies. The depiction of these two English kings presented them in death instead of life; they were depicted as they were on the funeral litter upon which the kings were presented and the sculptures themselves laid (see figure 6).[147] Imperial authority became more evident in these two effigies than others due to the fact that these kings presented a certain image of themselves through their seals, which became attached to them throughout their lives and in death.[148] By designing these effigies in this way, Eleanor of Aquitaine presented the secular authority of her husband and son.[149] This suggests that Eleanor possessed authority even after the deaths of her husband and son. Both men wore their full regalia in their effigies, including a crown, scepter, sword, spurs, and gloves with gold medallions placed on them.[150] Contrary to the previous tombs she designed, Eleanor depicts herself in life in her tomb effigy (see figure 7). She holds an open book, as if actively reading.[151] Besides her crown, she wears no regalia, signaling to medieval people her lack of political power.[152] She, however, claims a different type of power for herself. The use of the book associates her with nuns and abbesses, who were also depicted reading.[153] Her use of the

book connects her to Fontevraud, a community of religious women. This also "affirmed her devotion and so her passage to Heaven, the most significant reference that could be made in a funerary context."[154] Eleanor's effigy claims the images of the "ultimate Christian victory."[155] She evokes a sense of a living queen, not a "royal living-in-state."[156] In taking control of burial and obtaining prayers for the souls of her deceased family members, Eleanor fulfilled the traditional role of queen in the eyes of the English people, according to Turner.[157] By designing these tombs, she influenced how people throughout time would envision these kings and herself.

Eleanor of Aquitaine and Blanche of Castile both claimed great authority through the rules of their sons. Turner claims that while Richard I was king, "Eleanor of Aquitaine had moved from isolation and confinement following Henry II's death in 1189 to a premier position in England's government, a place that she had long assumed to be her right."[158] Throughout her lifetime, Eleanor yearned for power, which she eventually earned. During the reigns of her sons Richard and John, Eleanor became extremely involved in the politics and governance of England, sending letters and charters throughout the territories. Through her son Louis IX, Blanche gained great authority in France, holding the title of regent twice. Throughout her regencies, this queen proved herself capable of ruling France. These two queens demonstrated their authority in seals and the commissioning of tombs for the royal family. Though many people today have the idea that medieval queens were not involved in the politics and ruling of the kingdom or that their only purpose was to produce an heir, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Blanche of Castile contradict this notion. Both women held great authority and influence in the ruling of their respective kingdoms.

Endnotes

[1] Ralph V. Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine and her Children: An Inquiry into Medieval Family Attachment," *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1998): 326.

[2] Anne J. Duggan, "Introduction," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College, London, April 1995*," ed. Anne J. Duggan (New York: Boydell Press, 1997), XV.

[3] Ibid., XXI.

[4] Ibid., XXI-XXII.

[5] Petronelle Cook, *Queen Consorts of England: The Power Behind the Throne* (New York: Facts on Fire, 1993), 29.

[6] Ibid, 30. Though Cooks presents much information on Eleanor, she is quite biased toward seeing Eleanor as a powerful woman determined to get what she wants. Cooks provides insight into the actions of Eleanor, but does not provide sufficient evidence to support all of her claims.

[7] Guida M. Jackson, *Women Who Ruled* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO Inc., 1990), 61.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Cook, *Queen Consorts of England*, 32.

[10] Kathleen Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 79.

[11] Jackson, *Women Who Ruled*, 61.

[12] June Hall Martin McCash, "Marie de Champagne and Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Relationship Reexamined," *Speculum* 54, no. 4 (October 1979): 707.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 205-6.

[15] Ibid, 205.

[16] Peter of Blois, letter 154 to Queen, Internet History Sourcebooks Project, accessed November 1, 2013, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/eleanor.asp.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 205.

[19] Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine: Parent, Queen, and Duchess," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patron and Politician*, ed. William W. Kibler (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 20.

[20] Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine," 20.

[21] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 256.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 256-57.

[24] Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine and Her Children," 321.

[25] Rágena C. DeAragon, "Wife, Widow, and Mother: Some Comparisons Between Eleanor of Aquitaine and Noblewomen of the Anglo-Norman and Angevin World," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 100.

[26] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine,* 206.

[27] Cook, *Queen Consorts of England,* 35.

[28] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine,* 258.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 266.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 267.

[34] Ibid., 268.

[35] Ibid., 269.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Eleanor of Aquitaine, letter to Celestine III, 1193, Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters, accessed November 1, 2013, http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/141.html.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 270.

[40] Cook, *Queen Consorts of England,* 35.

[41] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine,* 275-76.

[42] Ibid., 279.

[43] Cook, *Queen Consorts of England,* 35.

[44] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine,* 280.

[45] Ibid., 275.

[46] Ibid., 281.

[47] Ibid., 283.
[48] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 285.
[49] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 80.
[50] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 286.
[51] Ibid., 290.
[52] Ibid., 290.
[53] Ibid., 291.
[54] Cook, *Queen Consorts of England*, 37.
[55] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 291.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Eleanor of Aquitaine, letter to John, king of England, 1200, Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters, accessed November 1, 2013, http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/900.html.
[58] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine,* 291.
[59] Ibid., 292.
[60] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine,* 292.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Margaret Wade Labarge, *Saint Louis: Louis IX, Most Christian King of France* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), 151.
[64] Jean de Joinville and Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. M.R.B. Shaw (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1963), 181.
[65] Jackson, *Women Who Ruled*, 36.
[66] Jean de Joinville and Villehardouin, *Chronicles of the Crusades*, 182.
[67] Labarge, *Saint Louis,* 35.
[68] Jean de Joinville and Villehardouin, *Chronicles of the Crusades*, 182.
[69] Labarge, *Saint Louis,* 37.
[70] Ibid., 39.
[71] Ibid., 37.
[72] Ibid., 47.
[73] Pope Gregory IX, letter to Blanche of Castile, queen of France, November 30, 1237, Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters, accessed November 1, 2013, http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/722.html.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Labarge, *Saint Louis*, 54.
[76] Ibid., 42-43.
[77] Ibid., 72.
[78] Jackson, *Women Who Ruled*, 36.
[79] Labarge, *Saint Louis*, 146.
[80] Henry III, king of England, letter to Blanche of Castile, queen of France, 1252, Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters, accessed November 1, 2013, http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/737.html.
[81] Labarge, *Saint Louis,* 54.
[82] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver,* 121.
[83] Henry III, king of England, letter to Blanche of Castile, queen of France, 1229, Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters, accessed November 1, 2013, http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/714.
[84] Henry III, king of England, letter to Blanche of Castile, queen of France, 1234, Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters, accessed November 1, 2013, http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/720.html.
[85] Cook, *Queen Consorts of England*, 36.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Jackson, *Women Who Ruled*, 36.
[88] Labarge, *Saint Louis*, 37.
[89] Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine and Her Children," 331.
[90] Kathleen Nolan, "The Queen's Choice: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Tombs at Fontevraud," in *Eleanor of Aquitaien: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 395.
[91] Labarge, *Saint Louis*, 56.
[92] Ibid, 56, 211.
[93] Ibid, 56.
[94] Ibid, 57.
[95] Ibid, 56.
[96] Elizabeth Danbury, "Queens and Powerful Women: Image and Authority," in *Good Impressions: Image and Authority*, ed. Noel Adams, John Cherry, and James Robinson (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 17.
[97] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 79.
[98] Ibid., 157.
[99] Danbury, "Queens and Powerful Women," 17.
[100] Ibid., 18.
[101] Ibid., 20.
[102] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 152.
[103] Ibid., 81.
[104] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 82.
[105] Danbury, "Queens and Powerful Women," 18.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 19.
[109] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 155.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., 83.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 83.
[117] Ibid., 84.
[118] Ibid., 86.
[119] Ibid., 163.
[120] Ibid., 135, 138.
[121] Ibid., 134.
[122] Ibid., 121, 141.
[123] Ibid., 140.
[124] Ibid., 162.
[125] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver,* 121, 135, 146.
[126] Ibid, 121.
[127] Ibid, 144.
[128] Nolan, "The Queen's Choice," 380.
[129] Ibid, 382.
[130] Jackson, *Women Who Ruled*, 62.
[131] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 293.
[132] Eleanor of Aquitaine, letter to the archbishop of Bordeaux, 1185, Henry III, Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters, accessed November 1, 2013, http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/885.
[133] Ibid.

[134] Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Authority, the Family, and the Dead in Late Medieval France," *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1990): 821.
[135] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine,* 294.
[136] Nolan, "The Queen's Choice," 378.
[137] Ibid., 380.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Nolan, "The Queen's Choice," 382.
[140] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 106.
[141] Ibid., 107.
[142] Ibid., 142.
[143] Nolan, "The Queen's Choice," 383.
[144] Ibid., 382.
[145] Nolan, "The Queen's Choice," 395.
[146] Ibid., 395.
[147] Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*, 110.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid., 111.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid., 112-113.
[154] Nolan, "The Queen's Choice," 394.
[155] Ibid., 395.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 260.
[158] Ibid., 278.

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