TRACY BORMAN

QUEENS OF THE CRUSADES

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE
AND HER SUCCESSORS 1154–1291

ALISON WEIR

ALISON WEIR

Alison Weir is one of Britain's top-selling historians. She is the author of numerous works of history and historical fiction, specialising in the medieval and Tudor periods. Her bestselling history books include *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, *Elizabeth of York* and, most recently, *The Lost Tudor Princess*. Her novels include *Innocent Traitor*, *Katherine of Aragon: The True Queen* and *Anne Boleyn: A King's Obsession*. She is an Honorary Life Patron of Historic Royal Palaces. She is married with two adult children and lives and works in Surrey.

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Queens of the Crusades

Eleanor of Aquitaine and her Successors 1154–1291

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This book is dedicated to my incomparable
god-daughter, Eleanor Borman, who is named for
the incomparable Eleanor of Aquitaine.

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Fair Rosamund by John William Waterhouse, 1916, National Museum of Wales. (Alamy)

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The kitchen Eleanor of Aquitaine built at Fontevraud. (© BrokenSphere / WikiCommons)

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The tomb effigy of Eleanor of Castile in Westminster Abbey. (Getty)

Eleanor's statue on the Eleanor Cross at Hardingstone. (Alamy)

The Eleanor Cross at Geddington. (Alamy)

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The Eleanor Cross at Waltham. (Alamy)

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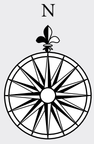
France in the twelfth century



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Vézelay
ANJOU
Tours
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Nantes
Saumur
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Niort
Lusignan
LA MARCHE
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La Rochelle
Île d'Oléron
Saintes
AQUITAINE
Cognac
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Cahors
Agen
Najac
Avignon
GASCONY
Tarascon
Grandmont
Dax
Arles
Aigues-Mortes
Bayonne
Toulouse
PROVENCE
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Mediterranean Sea

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Family Trees

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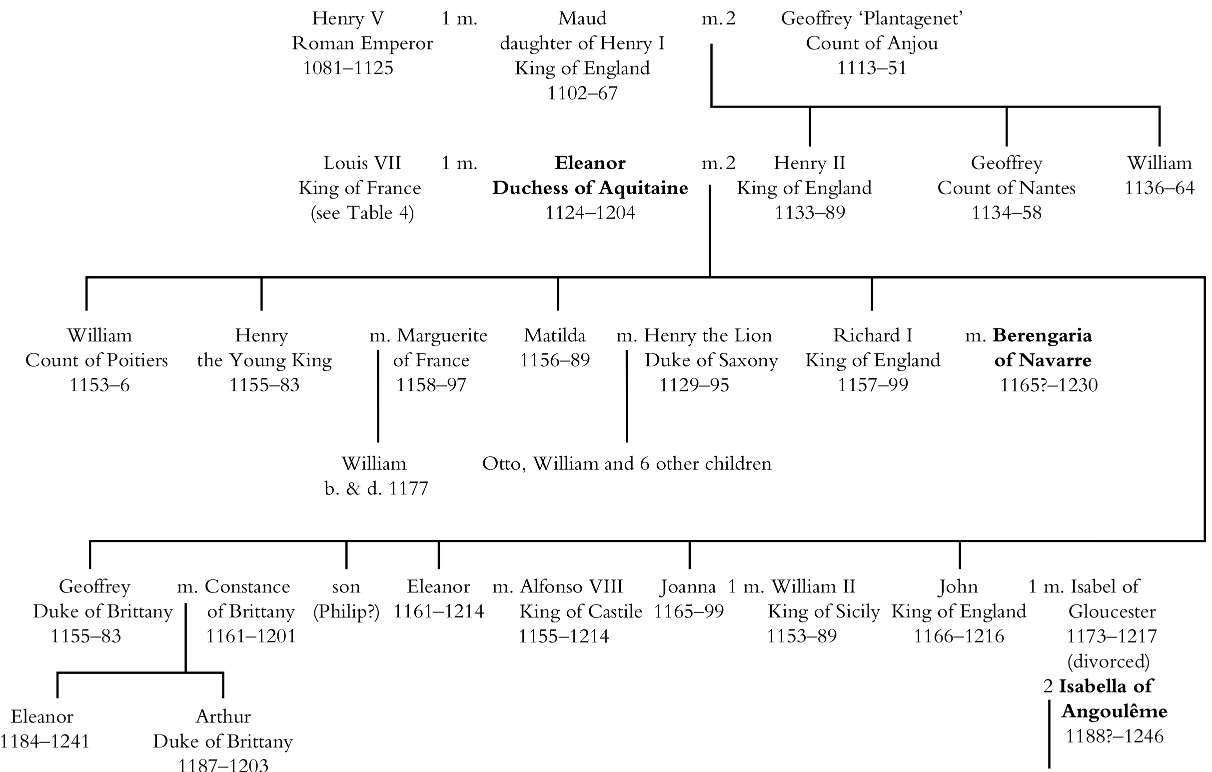
Table 1: The Plantagenets



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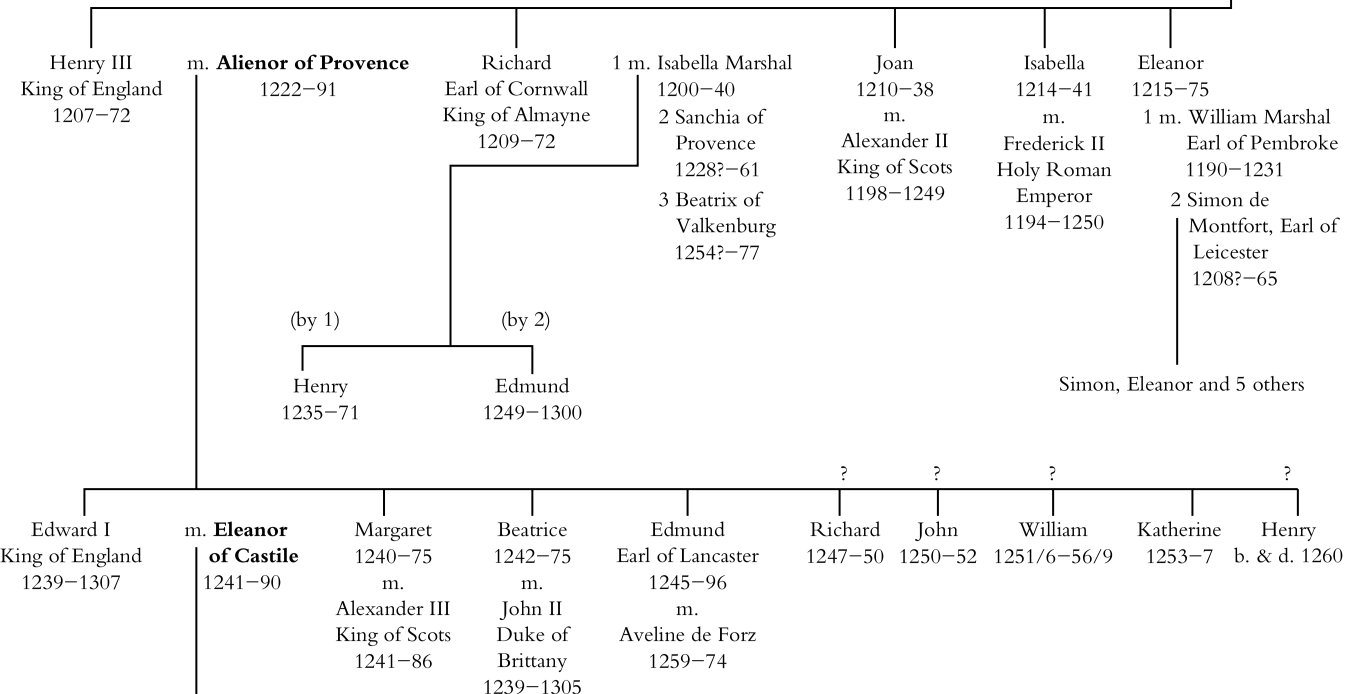

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Table 3: The Plantagenets

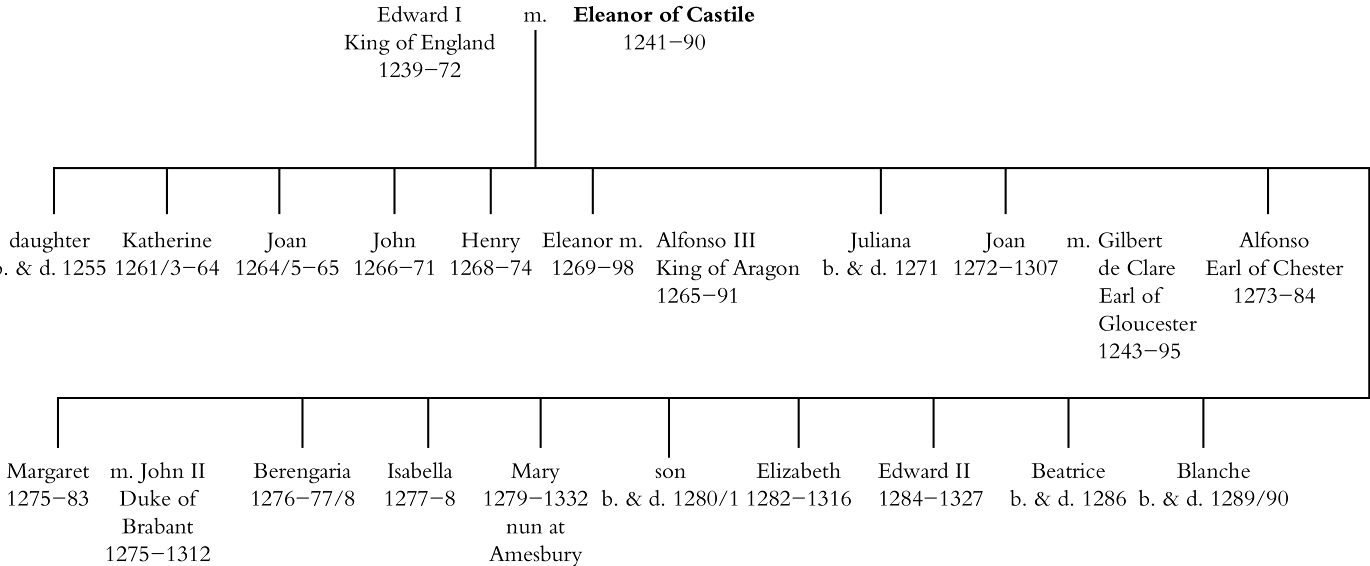

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Table 4: European Connections

Theobald, Count of Champagne and Blois

Henry II, King of England — m. 2 **Eleanor of Aquitaine** 1124–1204 — m. 1 Louis VII, King of France

m. 2 Constance of Castile 1136/40–60 — m. 3 Adela of Champagne 1140–1206

Marie 1145–98 m. Henry I, Count of Champagne 1127–81

Alix 1150–1197/8 m. Theobald V, Count of Blois 1130–91

Henry the Young King 1155–83 m. Marguerite 1158–97

Alys 1160–1220 m. William IV, Count of Ponthieu 1179–1221

Philip II, King of France 1165–1223

Theobald III, Count of Champagne 1179–1201 m. Blanche of Navarre* d.1229

Marie, Countess of Ponthieu 1199–1250 m. Simon of Dammartin 1180–1239

Louis VIII, King of France 1187–1226 m. Blanche of Castile

Theobald I, King of Navarre 1201–53

Joan, Countess of Ponthieu 1220–79 m. Ferdinand III, King of Castile 1199–1252

Louis IX, King of France 1214–70 m. Marguerite of Provence** 1221–95

Eleanor of Castile 1241–90 m. Edward I, King of England 1239–1307

Philip III

Philip IV

*sister of Berengaria of Navarre
** sister of Alienor of Provence

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Introduction

This book tells the stories of the lives of England's queen consorts during the early Plantagenet period, 1154–1291. It covers five queens. Eleanor of Aquitaine needs no introduction, for she was one of the towering female figures of the Middle Ages, and the subject of a biography I published in 1999. Much scholarship has been undertaken since then, and I have revised certain aspects of her story, focusing chiefly on her career as queen of England. Her daughters-in-law, Berengaria of Navarre and Isabella of Angoulême, deserve to be better known, especially for their careers after the deaths of their husbands, Richard I and King John. The thirteenth-century queens Alienor of Provence and Eleanor of Castile dominated the English establishment for nearly seven decades. Both were controversial, and I hope I have presented a fair view of them.

In regard to the title, *Queens of the Crusades*, I am aware that only three of these queens actually went on crusade, but they lived in an age dominated by the crusading movement, which touched all their lives.

This is the story of the history of England through the perspective of its queens, but much of the action takes place on a wider stage, for England was just a part of the Angevin Empire founded by Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. The book does not comprise a series of biographies, but tells the stories of the queens in a continuous, chronological narrative.

It is also important to understand how power was devolved in a feudal age. In the twelfth century, Europe was a hierarchical society, a patchwork of realms and principalities. There was no concept of nationhood or patriotism: all subjects owed fealty to their

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immediate overlord and to the King, who was the ultimate secular authority and answered only to God. Fealty was enshrined in the ceremony of homage, in which a kneeling vassal would place his hands between those of his king or overlord and swear to render him service and obedience. In return, an overlord was bound to offer protection and aid. A breach of fealty was held to be highly dishonourable, but feudal oaths were readily broken. English kings, in particular, resented paying homage to French kings for the continental lands they held of them.

Feudal vassals owed military service to their lords, supplying knights and men on demand for a certain number of days each year. This was how feudal levies were raised. There were no standing armies, although the levies might be supplemented by paid mercenaries.

Feudal custom and the developing code of chivalry demanded certain courtesies, even between enemies. Captive kings and lords were often on good terms with their captors; they met socially, exchanged gifts and even feasted together. This laid the foundation for future amicable relations once the captives had been ransomed.

As this book is intended for a general readership, I have kept references to a minimum and restricted them to original sources. Limitations on the word count do not permit me to list secondary sources in the references, so I wish warmly to acknowledge my indebtedness to the modern historians of the period and the recent biographers of these queens, especially (in alphabetical order) Darren Baker, Rachel Bard, Helen Castor, Sara Cockerill, Nancy Goldstone, Lisa Hilton, Margaret Howell, Elizabeth Norton, John Carmi Parsons, Ffiona Swabey, Ralph Turner, Anne Trindade, Nicholas Vincent and Kelsey Wilson-Lee. Their research, wisdom and insights have helped to inform this book.

It is difficult to calculate the modern equivalents of monetary values before 1270. Figures in brackets after monetary amounts are rough, rounded estimates of their worth today. A *livre tournois* equated on average to about a quarter of an English pound and 4/5 of a *livre* of Paris.

I am truly grateful for the tremendous support and creative input of my editor, Anthony Whittome. Warm thanks are due also to the publishing teams at Penguin Random House in London and New York. Special thanks go to my agent, Julian Alexander, and my husband, Rankin, for their unfailing kindness and understanding, especially when I was panicking about my deadline!

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Part One

Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of Henry II

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1
'An Exceedingly Shrewd and Clever Woman'

On Sunday, 19 December 1154, Henry II, the first Plantagenet King of England, was crowned in Westminster Abbey, along with his Queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, amidst great splendour and rejoicing. Monarchs had about them an aura of spiritual sovereignty, conferred on them at their anointing with holy oil. The coronation of a queen sanctified her and set her apart from lesser women. It enhanced the dignity of her husband the King – especially so in this case because, through his marriage to Eleanor, Henry II had become master of a great continental domain.

The royal dynasty established on that day was to rule England for 331 years.

There are many perceptions of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Debate rages over the extent of her political activity and her influence on culture. As a stateswoman, her influence was felt for over six decades – she was both notorious and respected. It is possible to regard her as a romantic heroine in the widest sense, even though the wilder myths about her have now been dispelled. She inspires the imagination today, just as she did in her own time. But the sources form an incomplete record, so there will always be room to ask the question: who was the real Eleanor?

She was undoubtedly a forceful character. She was heiress to one of the richest domains in medieval Europe. In the twelfth century, Europe was divided into feudal domains, and what is now France then comprised the kingdom of France itself and several vassal domains, or demesnes. The county of Poitou and the duchies of Aquitaine and Gascony covered a vast region in the south-west, about one third of modern France. By comparison, the kingdom of France was small, centred mainly upon Paris and the surrounding area. As descendants of the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne, whose

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empire had encompassed much of western Europe, French kings were overlords of all the fiefdoms, including Aquitaine, in the region roughly corresponding to modern France. This often led to power struggles between the kings and their vassals.

Aquitaine – named 'land of waters' after its great rivers – had been established as a duchy by the middle of the tenth century, and it was now very prosperous. In 1058, the southern wine-producing duchy of Gascony, with its bustling port of Bordeaux, had been absorbed into Aquitaine. Poitou lay to the north, where its northern border marched with those of Brittany, Anjou and Touraine, and its chief city was Poitiers. Eleanor's was a rich inheritance.

'Opulent Aquitaine [was] sweet as nectar thanks to its vineyards dotted about with forests, overflowing with fruit of every kind, and endowed with a superabundance of pasture.'[1] Aquitanians spoke the *langue d'oc* (Provençal), or Occitan, a Romance language derived from the dialect spoken by Roman invaders centuries before. North of the Loire, and in Poitou, they spoke Poitevin, or the *langue d'oeil.*

The Aquitanian lordships and castles were controlled by hostile, feuding vassals who resented interference from their ducal overlords and were notorious for their propensity to rebel and create disorder. They enjoyed a luxurious standard of living compared with their unwashed counterparts in northern France, and were regarded by northerners as soft and idle, yet they could be fierce and violent when provoked. Successive dukes had consistently failed to subdue their vassals or establish cohesion within their own domains, and their authority still did not reach far beyond the vicinities of Poitiers and Bordeaux. They did not have the wealth or resources to extend their power into the feudal wilderness and forests beyond these areas.

Nevertheless, the duchy was wealthy, thanks to its lucrative trade in wine and salt, and its religious life flourished. Successive dukes built and endowed many fine churches and monasteries, notably the Romanesque cathedrals in Poitiers and Angoulême. The twelfth century witnessed a great monastic revival, with the founding of several new orders: the Cistercians; the Augustinian canons, whose double houses admitted both men and women; the Carthusians, who lived under an austere rule requiring them to embrace a life of solitude and silence; and the Order of Fontevraud, especially dear to Eleanor of Aquitaine and her family. The nuns' necrology records that Eleanor 'was from her earliest life a patron of the church of Fontevraud'.

Eleanor 'sprang from a noble race'[2] of dukes who had been blessed with pious, feisty wives. Her grandfather, William IX, married

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Philippa, heiress to Toulouse, which bordered Gascony in the south. It was an important fiefdom, for through it wound the major trade routes that linked Aquitaine with the Mediterranean. But Philippa's uncle, Raymond, Count of Saint-Gilles, had usurped her inheritance and she saw in William IX a ruler with the power and resources to recover it.

This was an age of great religious fervour that witnessed thousands undertaking long, sometimes dangerous, pilgrimages to holy shrines, notably St James's at Compostela, St Peter's in Rome and Christ's burial place, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. Since AD 640, Palestine had been under Arab rule. In 1095, Pope Urban II had preached the First Crusade, in the hope of liberating Jerusalem. William IX, who did not take the cross, seized Toulouse in the absence of the usurping Raymond, who had led a crusading army to the East, having renounced his claim to Toulouse in favour of his son, Bertrand. William incurred the anger of the Church by violating the Truce of God, which required all Christians to refrain from invading the lands of a crusader during his absence.

In 1099, news of the taking of Jerusalem prompted William belatedly to take the cross. In 1101, at Heraclea, his army was cut to pieces by the Muslims (or Saracens, as Christians called them) and he had to return home. Back in Poitiers, inspired by the culture of the East and the erotic works of Ovid, he began writing sensual poems celebrating female beauty and the pleasures of love, for which he is accounted the first of the troubadours.

Feudal Europe was essentially a military society. Warfare was the business of kings and noblemen, increasingly conducted by the evolving rules of chivalry, a knightly code enshrining ideals of courage, loyalty, honesty, courtesy and charity. In this martial, male-dominated world, women had little place. The Church taught that the descendants of Eve were the weaker vessel and the source of all lechery. They were seen as feeble, irrational creatures who needed to be governed by men, and were expected to be chaste, humble, modest, sober, silent, charitable and well behaved.

Kings and noblemen married for political advantage, and women rarely had any say in how they or their wealth were to be disposed in marriage. Heiresses and rich widows were sold off to the highest bidder, for political or territorial advantage. The betrothal of infants was not uncommon, although the Church laid down the minimum ages for cohabitation as twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. Personal choice and love were not paramount considerations.

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The early *chansons de geste* (songs of deeds) had celebrated military ideals of courage in battle, loyalty, honour and endurance, but the troubadours of the south popularised the concept of courtly love, revolutionary in its day. William IX's court at Poitiers quickly became renowned for this new literary trend, and by 1100 it had become the foremost cultural centre in France. With this impetus, romantic literature flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, particularly in Aquitaine and Provence.

Drawing on Plato and Arab writers and influenced by the growing popularity of the cult of the Virgin Mary, the troubadours composed lyric poetry and songs. They deified women, according them superiority over men, and laid down codes of courtesy, chivalry and gentlemanly conduct. Thus were born ideals of honour and courtship that, in the centuries to come, would permeate European literature and culture to such a degree that their influence is still with us today.

The rules of courtly love gave a mistress mastery over her humble, worshipping suitor, who had to prove his devotion before his love was even acknowledged. The mistress (the word was the female equivalent of 'master') was an idealised figure, often high-born and frequently married, who was supposedly unattainable. In this aristocratic game – for such it was – the woman always enjoyed supremacy and the man was her servant. Her wishes and decrees were absolute, and any suitor who did not comply was deemed unworthy of the honour of her love. The ultimate favour was rarely to be granted, yet ideals of chastity permitted courtly lovers to sleep naked together so long as they did not have sex. The tenets of courtly love had little to do with contemporary notions of courtship and marriage, but, in the relaxed cultural atmosphere of the south, they flourished as an absorbing intellectual pastime of the upper classes; in the more sober north, courtly love was regarded as an excuse for adultery. There, a noblewoman who betrayed her spouse could be banished or imprisoned; for the man who cuckolded his overlord, the penalty was castration. Aquitanians, however, took a relaxed view of such matters.

The age of the troubadours came to a brutal end in the thirteenth century with the vicious persecution of the Cathar heresy in what became known as the Albigensian Crusade. This movement was led by Pope Innocent III and the kings of France, who were determined to eradicate the heretics, and it culminated in 1244 with the holocaust at Montségur, where 220 Cathars who had held out to the end were burned to death. The crusade left southern France so

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devastated that its native culture was effectively suppressed and, in many respects, irrevocably lost.

William IX's contemporaries were outraged by his amoral behaviour, and his wife turned increasingly to religion for solace. She had heard of Robert d'Arbrissel, an inspired teacher who wandered the roads of north-western France with his growing band of followers. His reputation was spreading, yet there were those who resented his assertion that women were in some respects the superior sex and made better administrators and managers of property than men. To some, this sounded like heresy. But many women were attracted by his enlightened and sympathetic views and his compassion for the outcasts of society, such as prostitutes and lepers.

Philippa persuaded William IX to grant Robert land in northern Poitou, where he could establish a religious community dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In 1101, by a fountain at Fontevraud, near the River Vienne, Robert founded a double monastery for priests, canons regular, lay brethren and 300 segregated nuns, all under the rule of an abbess – a revolutionary innovation for its time. In other respects, the abbey followed the rule of St Benedict. The men did the manual work and the women spent their lives in prayer. In 1104, building commenced on a new stone church, consecrated in 1119.

Robert stipulated that the abbess of Fontevraud must be nobly born and a widow, in order to confer prestige on the order and ensure that it was administered by someone familiar with running a large household. The office was to be filled by several royal and noble ladies. By the time of Robert's death in 1117, Fontevraud had become extremely popular with aristocratic women wishing to retire or temporarily retreat from the world. They were accommodated in their own apartments and could enjoy worldly comforts while living in seclusion. Most of the nuns came from noble families and had lay sisters as maids, but no one, however humble, was turned away. Thanks to the endowments of wealthy benefactors, Robert was able to establish daughter houses and cells elsewhere. The order quickly came to enjoy a towering reputation for piety and contemplative prayer, and thus fulfilled its founder's aims of enhancing the prestige of women in general.

In 1115, William IX conceived a violent passion for Amauberge de l'Isle Bouchard, aptly nicknamed 'Dangerosa'. She was the wife of his vassal Aimery de Rochefoucauld, Viscount of Châtellerault, and had

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five children: Hugh, Raoul (who would marry the heiress of Faye and become one of Eleanor of Aquitaine's chief advisers), Aenor, Amable and Aois. William abducted Dangerosa and bore her off to his palace at Poitiers, where he installed her in the newly built Maubergeonne Tower, which lent her another nickname, 'La Maubergeonne'.

When the Duchess returned from a visit to Toulouse, she was shocked to find her husband living in open adultery and begged the Papal legate to remonstrate with him. But it was useless; even excommunication had no effect. Philippa retired in grief to Fontevraud, where she died in 1118. Eleanor of Aquitaine was damned even before she was born by her grandfather's 'detestable adultery', which was said to taint her blood with licentiousness.[3]

In 1121, William IX's son and heir married Dangerosa's daughter Aenor. The future Duke William X was tall, broad and robust, with a quarrelsome nature. Little is known about Aenor. Her first child, the daughter who became known to history as Eleanor of Aquitaine, was probably born in 1123–4. A genealogy of the dukes of Aquitaine, made in Limoges in the late thirteenth century, stated: 'In 1136 [*sic*], on the fifth ides of April, William [X], Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine, died at St James in Galicia, leaving his only [*sic*] daughter, named Eleanor, aged thirteen years.' This is a late source,[4] and William IX actually died in 1137, but the genealogy is based on the contemporary chronicle of the knowledgeable Geoffrey de Vigeois. Eleanor's place of birth is not recorded.

Her name was a pun on the Latin *alia*-Aenor, 'the other Aenor', to differentiate her from her mother. It would later be said that it was 'an amalgam of "pure" [*ali*] and "gold" [*or*]',[5] but that was written with the benefit of hindsight.

Aenor bore William X two other children: Aelith, who later called herself Petronilla, and William Aigret.

William X's brief reign was marred by strife with his vassals and quarrels with the Church, but the court at Poitiers remained an important cultural centre. The new Duke patronised the troubadours Marcabru and Cercamon and perhaps the Welshman Bleddri, who may have told the courtiers some very early tales of King Arthur. William also patronised Fontevraud and other religious houses, displaying an innate piety that probably influenced the upbringing of his children, for it is clear that Eleanor's faith was the guiding principle of her life.

Her name first appears in contemporary records in July 1129, when she, her parents and her brother witnessed a charter granting

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privileges to the abbey of Montierneuf. Each inscribed a cross by their name, while the infant William Aigret made a print with a finger dipped in ink. In March 1130, the Duchess and her children took up residence at William X's hunting lodge at Talmont on the coast of Poitou. Aenor and William Aigret died there soon afterwards, leaving Eleanor as her father's heiress presumptive. At the age of six, she was old enough to realise that she was a very important little girl – the most important in Christendom.

Eleanor enjoyed a privileged girlhood, 'brought up in delicacy and reared with abundance of all delights, living in the bosom of wealth', according to the chronicler Richard le Poitevin. She grew up speaking Poitevin, and also knew French and some Latin. Later, she would master the Norman French that was spoken at her second husband's court, but she would never learn English.

Like all feudal courts, William X's was itinerant, and Eleanor travelled with him. His chief seat – and, later, hers – was the ancient palace at Poitiers, dating from the ninth century. Sited on the banks of the River Clain, it was surrounded by beautiful gardens and a moat. In the tenth century, William V had erected a great hall, which survives today, much altered, and is known colloquially as 'the Hall of Lost Footsteps'. The ducal apartments were in the imposing Maubergeonne Tower. Eleanor also spent time at the Ombrière Palace at Bordeaux, a tall keep known as 'the Crossbowman', which was set in courtyards with tiled fountains and beautiful semi-tropical gardens. Bordeaux was surrounded by a Roman wall, beyond which stood another residence used by the ducal family, the Tutelle Palace.

The education of women was generally considered unimportant. Unusually, Eleanor received a formal education in history, arithmetic, Latin and literacy skills. The troubadour Bertran de Born, who addressed chansons to her, commented, 'They were not unknown to her, for she can read.' A contemporary poet, Benoît de Sainte-Maure, called her 'one in whom all knowledge abounds'. It is possible that Eleanor received some education at Fontevraud, as two of her children later did.

That she shared her grandfather's enjoyment of literature and poetry can be inferred from her later patronage of troubadours such as Bernard de Ventadour, Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan and Rigaud de Barbezieux. Yet there is little evidence to connect her to any others, which suggests that the extent of her patronage has been overstated.

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Eleanor had wit and a welcoming manner. Like her female ancestors, she was strong-willed, independent-minded, intelligent, sophisticated and impetuous. She was blessed with great energy, vitality and robust health. She enjoyed hunting and hawking, riding astride as women usually did before the late fourteenth century, and kept royal gerfalcons at her hunting lodge at Talmont. Growing up in a sophisticated and highly civilised court, she developed a 'taste for luxury and refinement'.[6] Above all, she conceived a great love for her ancestral domains: throughout her life, they would always be her first priority.

All contemporary sources agree that she was beautiful. In an age in which chroniclers invariably described royal and noble ladies as fair, their praise of her sounds genuinely enthusiastic. Even when she was old, the chronicler Richard of Devizes described her as 'beautiful'. No one, however, left an actual description of her. Her tomb effigy shows a tall, large-boned woman, but may not be an accurate representation. The contemporary ideal of beauty was the blue-eyed blonde, and several historians have suggested that the chroniclers would not have praised Eleanor so highly if she had not conformed to it. Yet she perhaps had auburn hair, if the crowned lady in a mural in the church of Sainte-Radegonde in Chinon depicts her.

She enjoyed dressing elegantly in fine clothes, often of silk embroidered in gold thread – the famous *Opus Anglicanum* (English work). She loved jewellery, amassing many pieces during her life, including jewelled circlets to hold in place the veils that married women wore in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In a martial world, it was not considered practicable or fitting for a woman to rule a feudal state or wield dominion over men. It was imperative that a strong and powerful husband be found for Eleanor, to rule in her name.

2

'Mutual Anger'

In 1137, William X died while on pilgrimage to the shrine of St James at Compostela, leaving Eleanor, at thirteen, countess of

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Poitou and duchess of Aquitaine in her own right, and the richest and most desirable heiress in Europe. Suger, Abbot of Saint-Denis and chief adviser of William X's overlord, Louis VI of France, claimed that the dying Duke had requested that Louis take Eleanor under his protection and marry her to his son, another Louis. William had also insisted that her domains should not be incorporated into the French royal demesne, but should remain independent and be inherited by her heirs alone.

France was then immersed in a struggle for supremacy with its feudal vassals, who had extended their territories and become more powerful than the Crown, whose authority held little weight beyond the royal domains. Louis VI was ecstatic at the prospect of marrying his son to Eleanor. The annexation of her rich domains was greatly to his advantage, for it would give him equality with his richest, most powerful vassals and provide him with twice the amount of land and resources he had at present. Furthermore, if Eleanor bore an heir to France, her lands would be absorbed into the royal demesne in perpetuity.

The King wasted no time in dispatching his son to Aquitaine to claim his bride. The younger Louis was then about fifteen and, in 1131, according to Frankish custom, had been crowned king during his father's lifetime. A simple, sweet-tempered, unworldly and pious youth, he had lived as a 'child monk' at the abbey of Saint-Denis near Paris and was reluctant to abandon the religious life. But he knew his duty. In July 1137, he and Eleanor were married in Bordeaux Cathedral. As they rode towards Paris, they learned that Louis VI had died and that they were now king and queen of France.

They were unalike in temperament. Louis VII loved Eleanor 'almost beyond reason', but his conjugal visits were infrequent and resulted only in the birth of a daughter, Marie, in 1145, which was a disappointment, as the Salic law forbade the succession of females to the French throne. Virtually nothing is recorded of Marie's childhood, though the course of events suggests that Eleanor was a distant mother.

Bernard of Clairvaux later wrote that Eleanor took 'a determined political stance', yet, unlike previous French queen consorts, she rarely appeared in royal charters, even those Louis issued for Aquitaine. When she did, she either consented to his acts or confirmed them. She was, of course, just thirteen when she became queen, but the situation did not change with time. During her time as consort, there was a definite shift in the Queen's role, which

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broke with tradition and set a precedent for future French consorts, who mostly found themselves without political influence. Like their Norman counterparts in England, French queens had, until now, been active politically, having been consulted by their husbands on matters of policy and allowed to share in decision-making. But Eleanor played no more than a ceremonial role in public life and there is barely a mention of her in contemporary sources, especially in official documents. The almost total absence of criticism of her on the part of the chroniclers during these early years suggests that she accepted the redefined role expected of her.

William IX had mortgaged Toulouse to Bertrand, but when Bertrand died in 1122, leaving it to his brother, Alfonso Jordan, he had lost the heart to reclaim it. Eleanor inherited his claim and, in 1141, Louis attempted to take Toulouse, but failed. In 1142, Eleanor's sister Petronilla's adulterous affair with the King's cousin, Raoul, Count of Vermandois, who was married to the sister of Theobald II of Champagne, led to a war between Louis and Theobald, in which the town of Vitry-sur-Marne was burned with hundreds of its inhabitants. This left Louis weighed down by guilt, fearing that his soul was forever damned. Spiritual relief was at hand, however.

The First Crusade to capture the Holy Land from the Saracens, in 1096–9, had resulted in the establishment of four crusader states dominated by the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. These states, ruled mainly by Normans and Frenchmen, were collectively known to Europeans as Outremer ('beyond the sea'). The need to maintain a military presence to guard the holy places in Palestine against the Saracens and protect pilgrims had brought into being two crusading orders of knights under monastic vows: the Knights Hospitaller, founded in 1099, and their rivals, the Knights Templar, founded in 1118. Both guarded and protected pilgrims to the Holy Land, but the powerful and wealthy Templars also acted as bankers to the kings of Europe.

In 1144, the security of the Christian kingdoms was threatened when the city of Edessa in Outremer was occupied by Saracens. The way now lay clear for the Infidel to occupy the neighbouring principality of Antioch and the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem itself. The catastrophic news provoked widespread alarm throughout Christendom. The Pope proclaimed a second crusade, and Eleanor's uncle, Raymond of Poitiers, Prince of Antioch, appealed to Louis for aid.

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In June 1147, Louis and Eleanor departed for the Holy Land. The crusade was a failure, for many reasons, and what happened in Antioch ruined Eleanor's reputation, for 'the attentions paid by the Prince to the Queen and his constant, indeed almost continuous conversation with her aroused the King's suspicions'.[1] Attraction there may have been, but Raymond's ambition was to extend his territory, and 'he counted greatly on the interest of the Queen with the Lord King'.[2] He wanted the crusading army to help him defend Antioch, although Louis refused, being bent on recovering Jerusalem. A furious Raymond resolved to deprive the King of his wife. Eleanor 'readily assented, for she was a foolish woman. Contrary to the King's dignity, she mocked the laws of marriage and did not respect the marriage bed.'[3]

The Poitevin troubadour Cercamon, in a song thought to have been composed during the crusade, deplored the conduct of a woman who lay with more than one man – probably a veiled reference to Eleanor – and wrote: 'Better for her never to have been born than to have committed the fault that will be talked about from here to Poitou.'[4] English chroniclers were more reticent, although by the time they were writing, the matter was notorious. Gervase of Canterbury thought it prudent to remain silent about matters best left unspoken. Giraldus Cambrensis wrote, 'It is enough to note how Eleanor, Queen of France, conducted herself at first beyond the sea in the parts of Palestine.' Richard of Devizes commented cryptically in a margin, 'Many know what I wish none of us knew. This very Queen was at Jerusalem in the time of her first husband – let none speak more thereof, though I know it well. Keep silent.'

Later writers would tell wilder stories. Around 1260, the anonymous Minstrel of Rheims claimed that Eleanor was 'a very evil woman' who carried on a love affair by letter with the Muslim Sultan, Saladin, and tried to elope with him on a galley at Tyre, only to be seized by Louis at the jetty. 'You are not worth a rotten pear!' she is said to have screamed at him. The Minstrel omitted to say that Saladin was just thirteen at the time. His tale is typical of the legends circulating about Eleanor after her death.

In reality, Eleanor warned Louis that, if he did not support Raymond, she would stay in Antioch with her vassals. 'When the King made haste to tear her away, she mentioned their kinship, saying it was not lawful for them to remain together as man and wife, since they were related in the fourth and fifth degrees.'[5]

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Louis was 'deeply moved'. He loved Eleanor and did not wish to lose her, or her domains, but 'he consented to divorce her if his counsellors and the French nobility would allow it'. Acting on the advice of his advisers, he forced her to depart for Jerusalem with him, which caused a bitter rift between them. 'Their mutual anger growing greater, the wound remained, hide it as best they might.'[6]

In Rome, on the way home, they confided their marital problems to Pope Eugenius III, who would not hear of an annulment, but 'made them sleep in the same bed, which he had decked with priceless hangings of his own; and daily he strove to restore love between them'.[7] But there was still discord between the couple, and Eleanor complained 'that she had married a monk, not a king'.[8]

The birth of a second daughter, Alix, in 1150, was the final straw for Louis, who took it for a sign that God frowned on his marriage. His barons of France urged him to set Eleanor aside and marry someone less controversial who could give him sons.

Suger urged caution. If the marriage was dissolved, Louis would lose Eleanor's inheritance, which would then pass to whoever else she married – and she might choose someone hostile to French interests. Suger now devoted his energies to restoring amicable relations between the King and Queen. But then Henry FitzEmpress, the future Henry II of England, arrived in Paris, and everything changed.

3

'My Very Noble Lord Henry'

By 1150, when he was only seventeen, the reputation of Henry FitzEmpress was formidable.

His father, Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, was a vassal of the King of France and had been nicknamed 'Plantagenet' after the sprig of broom – *Planta genista* – that he wore in his hat (the name was not adopted as a royal surname until the fifteenth century). Henry II and his sons founded the Angevin royal dynasty, but the county of Anjou was lost to England in the thirteenth century, so modern historians have come to use the surname Plantagenet for them and their descendants, who ruled England until 1485.

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The Angevins – as the ruling dynasty of Anjou were known – had a poor reputation. 'From the Devil they came and to the Devil they will return,'[1] observed St Bernard of Clairvaux, the great twelfth-century mystic and reformer. He was referring to the notorious legend of an ancestress of the House of Anjou, a tale often fondly repeated by her supposed descendants. One of the early counts was said to have returned from a journey with a new wife, a beautiful woman called Melusine. She bore him four children and was satisfactory in every way, except that she would not remain in church for the sacrament of the Mass. This troubled the Count, who secretly arranged for four knights to stand upon her cloak and prevent her from leaving the service. As the priest prepared to elevate the host, Melusine tore free and flew shrieking out of a window. She was never seen again, for – it was concluded – she had been the Devil's daughter and could not bear to look upon the body of Christ.

Anjou was a rich and fertile territory on the River Loire. Emerging in the ninth century from an obscure past, its rulers were first styled counts in the tenth century and steadily increased in fortune, territory and power by virtue of brilliant diplomacy and a series of advantageous marriages with the heiresses of neighbouring domains. Anjou's location ensured that it was of great strategic importance in western Europe. To the west was the duchy of Brittany, to the north that of Normandy, to the east the counties of Blois and Champagne and the kingdom of France, and, to the south, Poitou and Aquitaine. There had been little love lost between the Normans and Angevins since 1066, when the Normans had gained ascendancy in northern Europe through William the Conqueror's acquisition of the kingdom of England.

The counts of Anjou were famously 'ferocious and combative'.[2] Henry of Huntingdon, writing in 1154, observed, 'It is well-known that the Angevin race has flourished under high-spirited and warlike rulers, and that they have dominated the people surrounding them with terror.' The Angevin greed for land and power was notorious. The counts were renowned for their hot temper, voracious energy, military genius, political acumen, engaging charm and robust constitution; the spectacular Angevin temper, violent behaviour and a tendency to go to extremes were all attributed to their demonic ancestry. No one was surprised that the counts of Anjou were often at loggerheads with the Church. Some were intelligent, cultivated men; most were known for their cruelties, their debaucheries and their feuds.

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The Angevins were a good-looking race. Many were tall, with a strong physique and red-gold hair, and their physical presence commanded respect from their peers and vassals. They were, in the main, dynamic and capable rulers.

Geoffrey Plantagenet had married Maud, daughter of the Conqueror's son, Henry I, King of England, and widow of the German 'Roman' Emperor, Henry V. She had become her father's heir when her brother William drowned in 1120. There was no precedent for a female sovereign, either in England or Normandy, yet the Norman queen consorts of England had proved that a woman could rule firmly and efficiently when serving as regent for an absent husband.

Geoffrey's shield, which appears on his tomb, is the earliest known example of what was probably a hereditary blazon – three golden lions, given him by Henry I, who may have used the symbol of a lion as his personal badge. This shield was probably one of the devices on which the heraldic trio of lions adopted by the Plantagenets was based.

The Empress Maud was 'a woman who had nothing of the woman in her'.[3] She despised Geoffrey for being merely the son of a count and unworthy of her. Yet they produced three sons to continue their line; the eldest was Henry FitzEmpress, born on 5 March 1133 at Le Mans.

When Henry I died in 1135, Maud's cousin, Stephen of Blois (son of the Conqueror's daughter Adela), usurped the throne. Stephen, who proved a weak and ineffectual ruler, also inherited Normandy, but Geoffrey immediately claimed it in right of his wife and proceeded to take it by force.

Maud focused on wresting England from Stephen. She launched a civil war and, in 1141, emerged victorious and was recognised as Lady of England and Normandy. In triumph, she went to London to be crowned, 'but she was swollen with insufferable pride by her success in war and alienated the affections of nearly everyone. She was driven out of London.'[4] After that, it became apparent that her cause was hopeless. England descended into anarchy as unscrupulous barons took advantage of the weakness of Stephen's rule to devastate the land, building unlicensed castles and engaging in private feuds and wars. Men said that, for nineteen winters, 'Christ and His saints slept'.[5]

In 1145, Louis VII of France acknowledged Geoffrey as duke of Normandy. In 1147, Maud relinquished her cause and her claim to

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England to her son, Henry FitzEmpress, and settled in Rouen. In 1150, Geoffrey invested Henry as duke of Normandy. The English barons were now heartily sick of civil war and anarchy, and were eager to have the succession settled. They, and the oppressed English people, wanted a ruler who would govern firmly and wisely and maintain the peace, as Henry I had, and they looked to his grandson as their hope for the future.

Henry FitzEmpress was to play a role of immense importance in the history of Europe. He had leonine features and cropped red hair, and was 'of middle height, reddish, freckled complexion, with grey eyes that glowed fiercely and grew bloodshot in anger, a fiery countenance and a harsh, cracked voice. His chest was broad and square, his arms strong and powerful.' His stocky frame had 'a pronounced tendency to corpulence, which he tempered by exercise; in agility of limb he was second to none'.[6] He was immensely hard-working and possessed of prodigious energy, 'liberal in public, frugal in private'[7] and abstemious when eating and drinking.

Henry had a formidable and forceful personality, being self-assured, articulate, intelligent and, unusually for a twelfth-century ruler, 'remarkably polished in letters'.[8] As a child, he had been taught by several renowned scholars, including Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose *History of the Kings of Britain* inspired in him a lifelong fascination with the Arthurian legends. As an adult, 'he had a ready knowledge of nearly the whole of history and a great store of practical wisdom'.[9] He knew 'all the languages from the French sea to the Jordan', but spoke only Latin and French.[10]

Henry was complex, unpredictable and wary. He kept his own counsel and preferred to do things himself rather than delegate. He had a will of iron and 'was never one to procrastinate'.[11] Hugh of Avalon, the saintly Bishop of Lincoln, thought him volatile, crafty and unfathomable. Walter Map, who wrote *De Nugis Curialum*, a gossipy 'little book I have jotted down by snatches at court', stated that no one compared with Henry in 'good temper and affability'. Yet, when he erupted in wrath, his face became empurpled with fury and he would throw himself raging on the ground, roll around yelling, or grind his teeth on the rushes. When angry, he could be vindictive. 'He readily broke his word'[12] and would be described by Thomas Becket as a Proteus in slipperiness. Caustic and cynical at times, he 'answered roughly on every occasion',[13] freely using his favourite oath, 'by the eyes of God',[14] which was considered

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blasphemous. He was eloquent in argument, had a sharp wit and particularly enjoyed a joke at someone else's expense.

Although he was a competent general, he despised violence and hated war, which he would avoid if he could reach a settlement by diplomatic means. He was not, by nature, a cruel man, unlike his Norman predecessors, but a restless and impatient soul who could not bear to stay still for long. 'Except when riding a horse or eating a meal, he never sits.'[15] He transacted business pacing back and forth and was forever fidgeting, even at Mass.

Henry was 'addicted to hunting beyond measure'[16] and would happily spend all day in the saddle. He chased women with the same kind of fervour. His vigorous sexual appetite was notorious. He had numerous casual encounters and several bastard children.

Henry was determined to unite Normandy, Anjou and England into one vast domain. Given the aggressive and increasingly threatening power of the House of Anjou, it was hardly surprising that, when he pointedly failed to pay homage to King Louis for Normandy, Louis refused to confirm him as its duke; the prospect of Henry building up such a formidable power bloc was alarming in the extreme.

Suger's death in January 1151 removed the last obstacle to the annulment of the marriage of Louis and Eleanor, who seized her moment and pushed for a divorce. By the summer, Louis was reconciled to an annulment.

First, however, the problem of Henry FitzEmpress had to be resolved. He and his father were summoned to Paris, where Geoffrey astonished everyone by advising Henry to offer Louis the Norman Vexin, a strip of land on the Norman–French border, in return for Louis recognising Henry as duke. In the tenth century the Vexin had been partitioned: the north was absorbed into Normandy, and the south became part of France. Since then, the Norman Vexin had been a bone of contention between the kings of France and the dukes of Normandy.

A satisfactory treaty was concluded. Henry paid homage to Louis for Normandy, was formally invested with the duchy and received the kiss of peace.

Writing in the 1180s, the knowledgeable Walter Map, who was later a trusted member of Henry's household, and in his confidence, stated that it was in Paris that his future master first cast lustful eyes

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on Eleanor – who, at twenty-nine, was eleven years his senior and still very beautiful – and that she, in response, 'cast her unchaste eyes' at him. He added that it was 'secretly reputed that [Eleanor] had shared Louis' bed with Geoffrey', Henry's father. Giraldus Cambrensis also asserted that 'Count Geoffrey of Anjou had carnally known Queen Eleanor. The Count later confessed this to his son' and 'frequently forewarned him, forbidding him in any wise to touch her, both because she was the wife of his lord and because he had known her himself'. In twelfth-century society, sleeping with your lord's lady was considered treachery of the worst sort, while adultery in a queen was a particularly serious offence, since it jeopardised the succession.

Giraldus claimed he had heard about Eleanor's adultery with Geoffrey from the saintly Bishop Hugh of Lincoln, who had learned of it from Henry FitzEmpress himself. At that time, Henry was trying to divorce Eleanor, so it would have been to his advantage to declare her an adulterous wife who had had carnal relations with his father, which would have rendered their marriage incestuous and provided grounds for its dissolution. The grounds on which Henry sought an annulment were shrouded in secrecy, but the fact that it was not granted is significant; incest of this kind would not have been overlooked.

Giraldus Cambrensis (also known as Gerald of Wales) was one of the foremost prolific and popular writers of his time. He was personally acquainted with most of the important contemporary public figures of the age and was an eyewitness to many great events. An ambitious man, he was appointed archdeacon of Brecon in 1172, and four years later was elected bishop of St David's by the cathedral chapter, although Henry II refused to confirm the appointment because he was suspicious of Gerald's royal Welsh blood. An embittered Giraldus became very antagonistic towards the King and wrote of him from a hostile point of view. He disapproved of Eleanor of Aquitaine and, in regard to her supposed adultery with Geoffrey, may have been tempted to exaggerate or massage the facts.

According to Giraldus, Henry ignored his father's warning. 'It is related that [he] presumed to sleep adulterously with the Queen of France. How could a fortunate generation spring from these copulations?' Walter Map also believed that the offspring of Henry and Eleanor were 'tainted at the source'.

Lust was only a part of the attraction fizzing between Henry and Eleanor. He was 'tempted by the quality of this woman's blood, but

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even more by her lands'.[17] The acquisition of such a bride would make him the greatest prince in Europe, greater than his overlord, King Louis. Eleanor was just as determined. 'She aspired to marriage with the Norman Duke, whose manner of life suited better with her own, and for this reason she desired and procured a divorce.'[18] Henry left Paris full of joy, probably because he and Eleanor had reached a secret understanding that they would marry as soon as her marriage was dissolved.

On 7 September, Count Geoffrey died of a fever after swimming in the river at Château-du-Loir. Henry took possession of Anjou, Touraine and Maine and set about securing the allegiance of his father's vassals.

On 21 March, at Beaugency on the Loire, Louis and Eleanor were granted an annulment on a plea of consanguinity within the fourth degree. It was agreed that Eleanor's domains would be returned to her. 'She now had the power to marry whomever she wished,'[19] provided she preserved her allegiance to Louis as her overlord. According to Gervase of Canterbury, 'people said that it was she who had cleverly brought about that contrived repudiation'.

When the proceedings were over, Louis and Eleanor took their leave of each other. They would never meet again. The previous September, when she had left Paris for the last time, Eleanor had probably said farewell to her two daughters, who were aged just seven and two. She must have known that losing them was the price she would pay for her freedom.

That freedom was threatened when Theobald of Blois and Geoffrey of Anjou, Henry's younger brother, with greedy eyes on her vast domains, each tried to abduct her on her way south, and she only narrowly evaded capture. It was now imperative that her marriage to Henry FitzEmpress be arranged without delay, or it might never take place at all. As soon as she arrived in her capital, she 'sent secretly to the Duke and announced that she was free'.[20]

Vassals and heiresses could not wed without the consent of their overlords. By all the laws of feudalism, protocol and courtesy, Eleanor and Henry should have sought King Louis' permission before marrying. Yet it was certain that Louis would refuse it. The prospect of Henry acquiring his former wife's domains would have horrified him. Marrying without his consent was an act of the greatest provocation, not to mention discourtesy, but the couple had decided to risk the consequences and keep their plans secret. Robert

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of Torigni, Abbot of Mont-Saint-Michel, was not sure whether Henry had married Eleanor 'on impulse, or by premeditated design'. Giraldus believed that the marriage was Henry's idea, and that he was guilty of 'taking her from his own lord and marrying her himself'.

Eleanor summoned her chief vassals to renew their allegiance to her as duchess of Aquitaine. She granted honours and privileges to those she favoured, among them Saldebreuil de Sanzay, Constable of Aquitaine, whom she made her seneschal, and her maternal uncle, Raoul de Faye. She underlined her autonomy by annulling all acts and decrees made by Louis in her domains, issuing charters in her own name and renewing grants and privileges to religious houses. Her industry suggests that she had been stifled by the constraints placed upon her as queen of France.

In March, a delegation from England had visited Henry in Normandy and begged him to delay no longer, as his supporters were losing patience. On 6 April, the day he received Eleanor's message, he met his Norman barons at Lisieux. His priority now was his marriage, and he wished to obtain their approval for the match before hurrying south to Poitiers. 'The Duke, allured by the nobility of that woman and by desire for the great honours belonging to her, impatient of all delay, took with him a few companions, hastened quickly over the long routes and, in little time, obtained his long-desired union.'[21]

On Whit Sunday, 18 May 1152, Henry and Eleanor were married in Poitiers Cathedral without pomp or ceremony. There is no record of a dispensation being sought, even though there existed between them the same degree of affinity as there had been between Eleanor and Louis.

Eleanor was now duchess of Aquitaine and Normandy and countess of Poitou and Anjou, and Henry had acquired a third of what is now modern France, more than doubling his continental possessions and gaining vastly in status, power, wealth and resources, as well as acquiring cities and castles of great strategic importance. He was now master of a domain that was ten times larger than the royal demesne of France. In marrying Eleanor, he founded an Angevin Empire; when he inherited England, that empire would extend 'from the further boundary of Scotland to the Pyrenean mountains'.[22] At nineteen, he had become the most powerful ruler in Christendom; and, by divorcing one husband and wedding another, Eleanor had managed to shift the balance of power in Europe.

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She had a seal struck with her new titles; she continued to issue charters in her own right and made generous gifts to religious houses. On 26 May, eight days after her wedding, she visited Montierneuf Abbey, where, styling herself 'Eleanor, by the grace of God, Duchess of Aquitaine and Normandy, united with the Duke of Normandy, Henry of Anjou', she confirmed the privileges granted by her forebears. The next day, she was at the abbey of Saint-Maixent to restore the forest of La Sèvre, which had been granted by Louis but taken back by Eleanor after her return to Poitiers. 'This gift I have renewed with a glad heart, now that I am joined in wedlock to Henry, Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou,' she declared in her charter.[23]

Early in June 1152, Eleanor made a pilgrimage to Fontevraud, where she was received by the Abbess Isabella, Henry's aunt. Eleanor's affection and reverence for Fontevraud comes across in the wording of the new charter she granted at this time to the abbey:

> After being joined to my very noble lord Henry, most noble Count of the Angevins, by the bond of matrimony, divine inspiration led me to want to visit the sacred congregation of the virgins of Fontevraud and, by the grace of God, I have been able to realise this intention. Thus, have I come to Fontevraud, guided by God. I have crossed the threshold where the sisters are gathered, and here, with heart-felt emotion, I have approved, conceded and affirmed all that my father and forebears have given to God and to the church of Fontevraud.

The charter is interesting because it also refers to Henry 'governing the empire of the Poitevins and Angevins', an early indication that the couple regarded their domains as an imperial entity.

The buoyant tone of her charters suggests that Eleanor was happy in her new marriage. Like most aristocratic marriages of the period, it was primarily a business arrangement between feudal magnates, with both partners committed to safeguarding their interests. Although little is known of relations between the couple before 1173, much may be inferred from circumstantial evidence. Henry and Eleanor had a great deal in common, being strong, dynamic characters with forceful personalities and boundless energy. Gervase of Canterbury implies that, at least to begin with, there was a strong mutual attraction between them; there was certainly a high degree

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of shared ambition and self-interest. Eleanor now had no cause to complain of a lack of husbandly attention, for the births of nine children are evidence that, for the first fifteen years of their marriage, Henry was a regular visitor to her bed. Naturally, he was the dominant partner, but he allowed Eleanor a certain degree of autonomy in regard to her own lands.

William of Newburgh claimed that Henry did not commit adultery until Eleanor was past childbearing age, but Giraldus stated that, before then, Henry was 'an adulterer in secret'. He took his sexual pleasure wherever he found it, with noble ladies and the 'creatures of the night' who regularly infiltrated his court.[24] In fact, he was unfaithful to Eleanor almost immediately. Of all Henry's bastards, the most famous was Geoffrey. According to Giraldus, Geoffrey had just turned twenty in April 1173 when he was elected bishop of Lincoln, so he was born probably in the spring of 1153, suggesting a date of conception just weeks after Henry's marriage.

Between 1158 and 1166, probably in commemoration of her marriage to Henry, Eleanor herself commissioned the stained-glass east window in Poitiers Cathedral, which was then being rebuilt in the Gothic style. Her role as donor is suggested by her position below the right hands of Christ, who is shown both crucified and risen in majesty. She kneels with Henry and their four eldest sons, two at either side; their presence determines the date of the window. This is perhaps the earliest surviving representation of Eleanor, although several biographers have suggested that one or more pairs of the statues of the kings and queens of Judah on the west porch and façade of Chartres Cathedral, completed around 1150, are likenesses of Eleanor and Louis. As Eleanor was queen of France at the time they were sculpted, she may have been the personification of queenship that inspired them.

There was little concept of portraiture in the early Middle Ages, so the few surviving representations of Eleanor are purely images of a queen. For example, two identical heads from the church of Notre-Dame-du-Bourg at Langon near Bordeaux (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) are thought to represent Henry and Eleanor and to date from 1152, the time of the couple's nuptial progress through Aquitaine. Other heads said to be Eleanor can be seen in Bordeaux Cathedral, the churches at Chaniers near Saintes, Sharnford, Lincolnshire, Barfreston, Kent, and Bradwell Abbey, Northamptonshire, and at Oakham Castle, Rutland. Two heads at

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Fontevraud, one of a young crowned queen, the other of an old woman in a wimple and barbette, may be images of her.

An illustration of a queen in the *Codex Manesse* (*c.*1304–40) in the university library at Heidelberg has often been assumed to be Eleanor, but there is no evidence for it. In the so-called 'Psalter of Eleanor of Aquitaine', executed probably in Paris in the late twelfth century (now in the National Library of the Netherlands), the donor portrait shows a lady at prayer wearing a cream cloak, a belted blue gown and embroidered shoes. Her hair is worn loose under a thin circlet and short veil. But Eleanor was a widow when the manuscript was produced, and widows, even queens, did not wear their hair loose. Moreover, a lordly figure portrayed in the manuscript is shown wearing a cloak lined with ermine, denoting his high status; the woman's cloak lacks ermine, showing her to be of lower rank. So this is almost certainly not Eleanor.

4
'Behold, the Lord the Ruler Cometh'

The marriage of Henry and Eleanor 'was the cause and promoter of great hatred and discord between the King of France and the Duke'.[1] Louis was 'greatly incensed' when he heard of it. He 'had no wish that [Eleanor] should have sons by another, for thus his own daughters by her would be disinherited'.[2] Convening a council of outraged barons, he complained that Henry had breached feudal law by having 'basely stolen his wife'[3] and summoned the guilty pair to his court to account for their conduct. Receiving no response, he felt fully justified in going to war. In June, he invaded Normandy.

Henry, who had left Eleanor in Poitiers and was preparing to sail from Barfleur, Normandy, to England with an invasion force, was forced to abandon his plans. In six weeks, he laid waste the Vexin and the domain of Robert of Dreux, Louis' brother. Louis gave up his cause as lost and returned to Paris.

Late in August, Henry and Eleanor made a four-month tour through her domains to introduce the new Duke of Aquitaine to his vassals. Their reception of him was cool. Always fiercely

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independent, they had resented French interference in the duchy, but Henry represented a more potent threat to their autonomy. They were deeply suspicious of his aspiration to be king of England and feared he would milk Aquitaine dry to achieve this. Some lords, although loyal to their Duchess, firmly informed her that they owed Henry no allegiance, save as her husband.

Henry and Eleanor were well received at Limoges, making camp outside the city walls, but, having been served a sparse dinner in their tent on the first night, Henry demanded to know why the burghers of Limoges had failed to provide the royal kitchens with the customary supplies. The Abbot of Saint-Martial explained that these were delivered only when the Duchess lodged within the city walls. Full of 'black bile', Henry gave orders for the walls of Limoges, so recently rebuilt, to be razed to the ground. In future, he declared, no abbot would be able to use them as an excuse to withhold from their Duke his just and reasonable dues.

After that, the sullen vassals of the south held their peace and the progress proceeded without further incident. In Gascony, Henry was able to recruit men for his invasion force, gather supplies and charter ships from the ports.

On 6 January 1153, he sailed from Barfleur, determined to win England. He left Normandy in the care of the Empress Maud, and Anjou and Aquitaine in the custody of Eleanor, who seems to have taken up residence at Angers, while Raoul de Faye acted as her deputy in Aquitaine. The massive castle of Angers was 'worthy to be called a palace for, not long ago, vast chambers were constructed, laid out and adorned in a luxurious manner, entirely worthy of a king. On the one side it looks out over the river [Maine] flowing past, and on the other towards the vine-clad hills.'[4]

It has often been stated that one of the troubadours Eleanor welcomed to her court at this time was the celebrated Bernard de Ventadour. Our only source for this is a short biography of him written by Uc de Saint-Circ in the thirteenth century.[5] Bernard, who was blessed with good looks and a fine singing voice, was the son of a kitchen maid in the household of Eble III, Viscount of Ventadour in the Limousin. Eble, whose family had a tradition of patronising troubadours, realised that the boy had talent and tutored him in the arts of poetry and composition. But, when Bernard repaid his noble patron by attempting to seduce his wife, he was ejected from the household and made to leave the district, while his hapless paramour was locked up by her enraged husband.

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'Bernard left and went to the Duchess of Normandy, who was young and of great worth, and she had understanding of matters of valour, honour and fine flattery, and liked songs in praise of her. Bernard's voice and songs pleased her greatly, and she received him warmly as her guest. He was at her court for a long time and fell in love with her, and she with him, and he composed many excellent songs for her. And all that I have told you about him [wrote Uc] was told to me by Viscount Eble of Ventadour, who was the son of the Viscountess Bernard loved so much.'

There are errors in this account, and some historians believe Uc fabricated parts of it, but the man from whom he got his information, Eble IV of Ventadour, was married to Eleanor's cousin, Sybille, daughter of Raoul de Faye, so there is probably some truth in it.

If Eleanor did encourage Bernard, and gave the impression that she returned his feelings, it was probably in the spirit of courtly love. It is difficult to identify the 'many excellent songs' he wrote for her. In some, he referred to 'the beautiful woman' who 'draws me to her like a magnet', describing her as 'noble and sweet, faithful and loyal, gracious, lovely, the embodiment of charm, one meet to crown the state of any king', which suggests that he was referring to Eleanor.

When, after a stormy crossing, Henry arrived on the south coast of England in January 1154, 'the earth quivered with sudden rumours like reeds shaken in the wind'.[6] When he went into a church to hear Mass, he heard the priest declare, 'Behold, the Lord the ruler cometh, and the kingdom is in His hand.' Interpreting this as a good omen, Henry pressed on in a buoyant mood, bent on relieving his chief supporters, who were under siege at Wallingford Castle.

'God Himself appeared to fight for the Duke.' In July, after months of skirmishing, during which he took many towns and castles and earned an impressive reputation for bravery and military skill, Henry at last confronted Stephen's forces before Wallingford. 'The noble youth was at the head of his army, his physical beauty betokening that of the soul, and marked out by arms that did not so much become him as he his arms.'[7] The English barons and bishops, prominent amongst them Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury, urged the two leaders to negotiate, many feeling that Stephen should acknowledge Henry as his heir. The sudden death of Stephen's son, Eustace, Count of Boulogne, on 17 August, probably from food poisoning, made things much simpler.

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