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Rumor and Intercession: How Eleanor of Aquitaine's Mediator Role Affected Her Reputation as Queen of England

THESIS

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by

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DEDICATION

To

my family and friends

in recognition of their worth and for putting up with me as I talked about this thesis non-stop for two years.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This paper expands upon the argument that Peggy McCracken makes in her article, "Scandalizing Desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Chroniclers," which states that the adulterous depictions of Eleanor in chronicles on the Second Crusade reflect political anxieties of the male authors over the influence queens exerted over kings. Rather than merely focus on the influence Eleanor had over Henry II, her husband, this paper considers the role mediation played in the way authors depicted Eleanor. Queens in medieval society acted as mediators between not just their children and the king, but subjects as well. It was common for queens to ask for mercy of the king on behalf of their people, for instance, and Eleanor was no exception. However, Eleanor abandoned this role when she sided with her sons during the Revolt of 1173 and became imprisoned by Henry, being removed from his side and thus losing her ability to mediate. Such a shift in dynamics would have affected the public in addition to Eleanor, invoking anxiety that could contribute to the queen's poor

depiction in later stories. This paper explores this connection between her role as mediator and her reputation by first discussing rumor theory in queenship scholarship and how it relates to Eleanor. Then, the history of mediation and queenship will be summarized while also addressing how few documents about Eleanor survive and how that impacts any scholarship about her. It is due to this lack of sources that stories about Eleanor, regardless of how factual they might be, are important to scholarship about her. McCracken's argument is explained afterwards, connecting both to Eleanor and her role as mediator. Lastly, this paper analyzes letters sent to Eleanor both before and after the Revolt of 1173 to show a negative shift in how Eleanor became viewed due to the event. The paper then argues how this change could be related to Eleanor's loss of her mediator role.

Introduction

Since her death in 1204, Eleanor of Aquitaine has proven to be perpetually fascinating both to her contemporaries and writers hundreds of years later.[1] Eleanor was queen of France from 1137 to 1152 when married to Louis VII, and then later became queen of England from 1154 to 1189 as Henry II's wife. She was also duchess to Aquitaine, a portion of land that made up more than a third of France, from 1137 until her death in 1204 - a position she inherited through her father, William X. Due to her influential position not only as queen to two powerful kings but also the ruler of her own region, Eleanor had a lot of authority, more so than the average medieval queen.

While queens did play a role in rulership, it was typically more subtle and enacted through their king husbands. The most common instance of queenly rulership occurred through intercession – mediating relations between their families and spouses, pleading mercy for subjects, and more. Eleanor did partake in mediation for her husbands, but she also had power of her own because of her inherited territory. Later in her life, she attempted to gain more independence through her sons by encouraging their rebellion against Henry II in 1173 and separated herself from her mediator role in the process. This change gave rise to anxieties within her subjects about the degree of power she held, which resulted in rumors of infidelity being written about her. Infidelity rumors about queens and aristocratic women have a history of being caused by political turmoil, and Eleanor's case is no exception. This thesis attempts to prove that such rumors are the direct result of Eleanor abandoning her queenly role as mediator by first reviewing the historical literature on royal marriage, accusations about queenly infidelity, and Eleanor's own past, and then analyzing letters sent to Eleanor from her subjects to see how her

[1] Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine Reconsidered: The Woman and Her Seasons," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1.

public abandonment her of role as mediator through her support her sons' revolt against their father, changed the way she was perceived.

Many stories and books have been dedicated to Eleanor over the centuries. However, despite the large array of books and articles dedicated to Eleanor, not a lot of factual information about her survives. Her contemporaries focus more on Eleanor's husbands than Eleanor herself. Furthermore, many of the stories that do exist about Eleanor are legends rather than fact. As Elizabeth Brown states, "the search for the 'true' Eleanor has been hampered by the legends that, since her own time, she has inspired."[2] Many stories about Eleanor exist from rumors of infidelity during her time in the Second Crusade with Louis VII to tales of her poisoning Henry II's mistress, Rosamond, to her having a Court of Love during her imprisonment where she acted as judge in romantic disputes between her subjects.

These legends have been proven false by Frank McMinn Chambers who painstakingly went through each rumor about Eleanor to see whether they held any historical significance or truth in his 1941 article "Some Legends Concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine." He found that the presence… among the crusaders tickled the popular imagination and provided a starting point for fanciful accounts of their doings."[3] Thus, the reason why a wide range of tales exist on Eleanor during her time in the crusade. One story has Eleanor leading into battle a band of warrior ladies who fought bravely beside their husbands and caused the latter to have concern for their safety, and thus disrupted the order of the army. Another story depicts Eleanor derailing a battle by slowing the army down due to bringing too much luggage. The most common story about Eleanor during the crusade, though, is that she had an affair – a rumor that originated in and was

[2] Ibid, 2.
[3] Frank McMinn Chambers, "Some Legends Concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 4, no. 16 (1941): 460.

perpetuated by chronicles. With whom she cheats in such chronicles varies. First, she is accused of having an affair with her uncle Raymond of Poitiers. Later chronicles suggest the affair occurred with a sultan. The general story, however, remains the same: Eleanor falls under the influence of another man through her role as mediator, goes against Louis VII's will, unsuccessfully requests a divorce and then tries to run away from the king, only to be captured by her husband and forced to continue with him on the crusade.

Chambers argues that this story is most likely fiction, by pointing to John of Salisbury's account of the Second Crusade. In his *Historia Pontificalis*, written during Eleanor's lifetime and published in 1163, which was about ten years after the crusade in question, John of Salisbury makes no mention of Eleanor having any sort of affair while visiting Antioch or anywhere else in the Middle East. If an affair did occur, then surely John of Salisbury would have mentioned it in his account of events. Thus, Chambers concludes that the story is most likely fictional – or at the very least, not enough evidence exists to prove the story is true.

Indeed, due to the sparseness of evidence regarding Eleanor and the near mythical status she as acquired through legends, historians have mistakenly linked the queen with movements and events in which she actually played no part.[4] For this reason, Eleanor became a target for wish-fulfillment and projection by both historians and her contemporaries. Scholars linked ideas of what women might have been in the twelfth century to Eleanor without evidence of whether Eleanor specifically was actually like that. It is thus important when studying Eleanor to focus solely on what existing sources reveal; for although there is not a lot of them, what remains can reveal quite a bit as Brown proves. Eleanor's authentic accomplishments and activities are impressive and interesting on their own without embellishment: she lived to be over eighty years

[4] Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine Reconsidered: The Woman and Her Seasons," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.

old in a time when most women died in their twenties and thirties, she owned enormous land and wealth through inheritance from her father William X of Aquitaine, she was a crusader, she ruled Aquitaine for sixty-seven years as sovereign while also sporadically being queen of France and then England, she was mother to three kings, and she knew some of the most important people of her time such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Becket.[5]

In fact, just looking at Eleanor's marriages reveals a bit about who she actually was. Her father died when she was only thirteen, making the king of France, Louis VI, guardian over her and the lands she inherited. The king decided that his son should marry Eleanor, as a result, in order to keep the lands under the French throne. This decision unfolded the chain of events that led to the to the subordination of Aquitaine to France and then to England. However, in the short run, this marriage was beneficial to both Eleanor and Louis. It brought thirteen-year-old Eleanor support against the restless lords of Aquitaine while Louis garnered power in a rich region that had formerly been exempt from French control. Due to his marriage to Eleanor, Louis VII had, as king, the ability of exerting more authority and enjoying more wealth than his father had. As a result, Louis VII doted on Eleanor, but she was unhappy throughout their eight year marriage. While on crusade together, clear signs of breach between the king and queen materialized.[6]

According to John of Salisbury, Eleanor was the first to raise the issue of consanguinity in an attempt to bring their marriage to an end. During the time in which Eleanor lived, divorce was mostly only granted on grounds of consanguinity, or close blood relation. Essentially, couples had to be seven times removed from a common ancestor in order to be lawfully wed

[5] Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine Reconsidered: The Woman and Her Seasons," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 4.
[6] Ibid.

under the eyes of the church.[7] However, aristocrats often disregarded this rule because there were a limited number of eligible partners from noble families and many nobles were related. A sort of window thus emerged where the elite could marry someone of close relation and then divorce them on the grounds of said relation. Nobles often took advantage of this to get out of unfavorable marriages, and Eleanor was no exception. Thus, it was on the grounds of consanguinity that Eleanor and Louis VII got their marriage dissolved.

Why Louis agreed to ending his marriage with Eleanor is somewhat under debate. According to Elizabeth Brown, his reputation had been tarnished by the crusade's failure and his supporting the Angevins' (Matilda, Henry I's daughter, and her son Henry II) claim to the English throne when ultimately Stephen earned the crown did not help.[8] Thus, whether motivated by the crusade's outcome or simply worn out by Eleanor's demands for a divorce, Louis VII was ready for separation in 1152. That the couple only had two daughters and no sons helped get the divorce granted.[9] Once separated, Eleanor regained her duchy over Aquitaine from Louis VII. Less than two months later, she married Henry II who at the time was count of Anjou and not yet king of England. Eleanor's prestige and lands gave Henry the assets he needed to conquer England while for Eleanor the union meant she would be exchanging one royal title for another. Until 1163, Eleanor even acted as formal regent for England during Henry's frequent visits abroad, so the marriage also granted her more freedom to exert power than she had before. While Eleanor was involved in their children's lives, she did consider her commitment to politics

[7] Constance B. Bouchard, "Consanguinity and Noble Marriages in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Speculum* 56, no. 2 (1982): 268-287.
[8] Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine Reconsidered: The Woman and Her Seasons," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) Kindle.
[9] Ibid.

and governance more important.[10] However, after the death of his mother Matilda in 1167, Henry gave Eleanor more rule over Aquitaine, which may have removed her from governing England to the extent she had previously enjoyed.[11]

Henry distancing himself from Eleanor, thus making it more difficult for him to be influenced by Eleanor, would have impacted his own rule. In medieval Europe, queens often played an integral role in the rulership of kings. They served as mediators between the king and his subjects. In fact, intercession was one of the roles of queens that enabled them to exert a fair amount of power that was actually accepted by the clergy and public. As Kristen Geaman puts it in her article about queen's gold, intercession had an increasingly prominent role in medieval society and remained an acceptable avenue of queenly authority because it stressed the traditional feminine roles of mother and wife.[12] Mediation was thus expected of queens, specifically because it played a wide range of useful roles for the king. It affirmed the gender hierarchy by requiring and allowing male rulers to change their minds without appearing weak by doing so. Intercession let queens exemplify mercy in relations to the king's stern justice. Both king and queen worked in tandem in this mode of rule. For this reason, Theresa Earenfight has argued that separating this collaborative pair would weaken each participant.[13] Henry removing himself from this dynamic meant that Eleanor was weakened and could not be as politically active as she wanted. Inversely, Henry was unable to be as merciful in his rule because he no

[10] Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine Reconsidered: The Woman and Her Seasons," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 12.
[11] Ibid, 12.
[12] Kristen Geaman, "Queen's Gold and Intercession: The Case of Eleanor of Aquitaine" in *Medieval Feminist Forum Vol 46*. (2010) 10-33.
[13] Theresa Earenfight, "Without the Persona of the Prince: Kings, Queens and the Idea of Monarchy in Late Medieval Europe," *Gender & History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 10.

longer had a publicly acceptable reason to change his mind on matters without being perceived as weak.

As a result of Henry's distance, Eleanor's ambitions became centered on her children and their fortunes from 1167 onward, resulting in her playing an essential part in her sons' rebellion, which further impacted Henry II's rule. Eleanor more permanently separated herself from her husband by supporting her sons because it ensured Henry would never take her back to his side. This shift affected individuals who depended on the previous system, or more specifically went to Eleanor to appeal to the king on their behalf. No longer being the point of contact for appeals greatly shifted how Eleanor was perceived as she derived a great deal of authority through the position as queen. Without being a mediator, Eleanor's power as queen diminished which correlated to how she was viewed; her popularity decreased as evidenced by infidelity rumors surfacing about her during and after this time.

It is thus unsurprising that so many rumors resulted after Eleanor supported her sons' rebellion. As Peggy McCracken poses in "Scandalizing Desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Chroniclers,"[14] Eleanor's sexual relationship with the king, specifically the political influence she wielded through such a position, invoked anxiety in male authors which thus caused them to depict the queen as adulterous in chronicles and stories. After all, what better way to portray how fickle someone can be than to show them being unfaithful to their spouse? Eleanor not remaining consistent in her own marriages belies her ability to be a good queen or stable ruler. People would be less inclined to trust her governing decisions or influence as a result. The male authors therefore cast doubt over Eleanor, enforcing their own anxieties in the process, by portraying her

[14] Peggy McCracken, "Scandalizing Desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Chroniclers," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John C. Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

as unfaithful. McCracken believes this fear was solely the result of Eleanor having too much influence over her husbands; that they felt a woman should not possess so much power.

Yet, McCracken does not acknowledge how Eleanor's role as mediator, a common and widely accepted position for queens in the twelfth century, could have given rise to author anxieties. More specifically, she does not consider that perhaps rather than Eleanor having too much influence over Henry being the cause of author anxiety, authors were actually concerned over the fact that she did not have enough of such influence - especially once she lost her mediator position after helping her sons' rebellion. How did Eleanor losing her role as mediator have influenced the anxieties expressed in legends and chronicles? What were public perceptions of Eleanor before the rumors began? How might these opinions have affected the way Eleanor was portrayed later on in the rumors? Considering the rumors, specifically those pertaining to infidelity, did not arise until after Eleanor was imprisoned for her role in her sons' rebellion, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the two events could have a correlation.

Portraying wives of leaders to be unfaithful was a common practice amongst authors for centuries before and after Eleanor was alive. It was a way to depict them as troublemakers due to the influence they wielded as mediators. This paper focuses on how the way Eleanor 's mediating ability was perceived by the public potentially affected the adultery rumors from her time in the Second Crusade, as there is already precedence of connecting adultery in chronicles to political anxieties. An analysis of the letters that were both sent to and written by the queen, shows how the attitudes of Eleanor's subjects changed in relation to her apparent abandonment of her mediator role during the rebellion between her sons and her husband. This shift subsequently affected the way Eleanor was portrayed in stories, giving rise to the rumors of infidelity during the Second Crusade. In showing how the depiction of Eleanor in chronicles

changed due to her supposed neglect of being mediator, this paper hopes to prove that Eleanor's own actions influenced the way she was depicted in history. By focusing on how Eleanor's actions, rather than just her situation, affected her depiction in adultery stories, the following analysis emphasizes the importance of the woman and queen she was to the evolution of her reputation.

Historiography of Rumor Theory

While studying the biases behind medieval chronicles can reveal a wide range of information about past societies and individuals, this paper will be focusing specifically on attitudes toward gender. Since the majority of surviving writings from the medieval period and earlier were written by men, there are little to no accurate depictions of women – as men were biased towards women due to religion, societal gender roles, and more. Yet, we can learn from the choices that authors made in regard to depicting women about the gender norms and values of their society and time, understanding how families, governments, and other hegemonies were structured in the past before Eleanor's time.

Leslie Brubaker points out in "Sex, Lies and Textuality: The Secret History of Procopius and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium" That "as has been recognised for some time… sexual slander directed against women is a familiar component of Roman and western medieval invective."[15] In late ancient Rome, accusations about women said more about how their husbands were perceived than the women themselves as such slander was used to undermine men's political reputations. Thus, a lot can be learned about political anxieties when looking at gender depictions of queens, or empresses, from that time period.

[15] Leslie Brubaker, "Sex, Lies and Textuality: The Secret History of Procopius and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83.

In ancient Rome, for instance, the literary depiction of women was almost always related to politics. According to feminist historian Kate Cooper, "discourse about female power served more often than not as a rhetorical strategy within competition for power among males themselves."[16] In other words, since gender as a whole was understood at the time in the context of men, the character and actions of male groups and male individuals, women were constantly perceived in relation to men – at least in literature. For this reason, texts that attribute political and religious innovation to the influence of women on their male sexual partners subsequently cannot be read at face value. In addition to being frequently crafted to amplify a male leaders honor or shame, these texts fail to accredit women with power of their own, unrelated to influencing kings, but they also treat powerful queens who did impact the rule of their husbands as outliers, exceptions, rather than the norm of rulership.[17]

In Rome, men justified their power to the public through virtue – a wife's fidelity was an extension of that virtue for a man who possessed virtuous traits would have a partner who had those same performance of virtue. At the very least, according to this logic, a virtuous man would command enough respect from his wife that she would refrain from cheating on him. This reasoning stemmed from that applied to senators in which only virtuous individuals were worthy of having power in government. Kate Cooper writes that "commonplace of Roman moral rhetoric associates uncontrolled female sexuality with chaos."[18] In other words, women's faithfulness or lack thereof was a quick and effective way to influence their husband's reputations (as well as their own). For, to have an unfaithful wife meant to be without virtue and

[16] Kate Cooper, "Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy" *JRS* 82 (1992): 151.
[17] Ian Wood, "Royal Women: Fredegund, Brunhild and Radegund," in *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450-751* (London and New York: 1994), 120-139.
[18] Sandra R. Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus's Messalina," *Signs* 21, no. 1 (1995): 60.

to be without virtue meant one was not fit to lead. Subsequently, adultery among wives was a common theme in Roman chronicles commenting on politics and men in power.[19] As female desire correlated to adultery, a woman wanting another partner, it is indicative of government change within Roman chronicles and stories.

An excellent example in which reports of out-of-place female desire, i.e., adultery, corresponds to discourse of Empire, how government serves as a way of expressing anxiety about the emperor's power, is Tacitus's writing about Messalina. As with many prominent women of ancient Rome, [20] and even the main subject of this paper Eleanor of Aquitaine, what we know of Messalina, her marriage to Claudius, and her other deeds is shaped by the many stories written about her within a few hundred years of her death. In these stories, her chief features are violence, ferocity, and unbridled sexuality. But these features derive from Tacitus's construction of her excessive desire as producing an emasculating chaos. He creates the image of an adulterous wife whose desire causes disorder in the family, household, and social hierarchy. Her agency makes Claudius seem passive in comparison when she supposedly manipulates him – she has an affair behind his back to which he is clueless and conspires against him with her lover. Thus, Claudius is an object of female manipulation through his sexual desire for women within the story; he cannot avoid being influenced and subjected to Messalina's sex appeal. Yet, with agency also comes blame, making Messalina the reason for all the cruelty that occurred under Claudius's reign – at least according to Tacitus's writings. Messalina is thus a representation that allows historians to make a distinction between a good empire and a bad one – or more specifically what Tacitus thinks is good and bad.[21] Essentially, Messalina's desire

[19] Cooper, 150-164.
[20] Joshel, 50-82.
[21] Joshel, 52.

symbolizes the out of control desire of the empire; it shows what unruly desire can do and how it can wreak havoc when a ruler is not in control of his own desire. Tacitus's depiction of Messalina, and how women in general are represented in chronicle writings, serves as a dividing point between what the author wants or believes politically and what he fears; the former being a faithful woman and hence copacetic empire and the latter being empire as a whole since like an adulterous woman it can wreak havoc due to an individual's aspirations.

Prokopios' characterization of Justinian's wife Theodora in the *Secret History* further demonstrates the connection between author anxieties in relation to politics and their representation of powerful women in the late Roman Empire. As Leslie Brubaker observes, Prokopios defines the perfect consort and makes Theodora the opposite. He depicts her as adulterous and conniving against her husband rather than faithful and supportive. His criticisms of Theodora are very gender-based and predictable; they center on domesticated female arenas of family, marriage, sex, emotions, and decorum. In each case, Theodora inverts what was normative behavior at the time of Prokopios writing, which was in the sixth century. As female status was dependent on marriage and family, Prokopios slanders Theodora through accusastions of sexual sins, weakening her role within her marriage and family, as a means of taking away her power within the story. Thus, even though *Secret History* tells us nothing about Justinian and Theodora, who they were in real life, it does reveal a great deal about how gender was constructed and how those constructs were subverted for use as social commentary. [22]

Since adultery correlates to what the authors of imperial chronicles did not want, female desire within such stories is often emblematic of government corruption. Desire shows up and

[22] Leslie Brubaker, "Sex, Lies and Textuality: The Secret History of Procopius and the Rhetoric of Gender in Sixth-Century Byzantium," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 83-101.

suddenly events are portrayed as immoral – a woman cheats on her husband, a wife tries to overthrow her husband and upend an entire government structure.The message of their adultery is not that women being in power is bad, but rather people acting for private interests instead of the benefit of politics as a whole leads to government failure; virtue, the epitome of politics in Rome, falls to the wayside thus leading government to fall as well. For example, Theodora is not the only one whose character gets maligned through accusations of her adultery, which are aimed primarily at her husband Justinian. He, the embodiment of government, is made weak through accounts of her immoral deeds. This indicates that the author's fear was the dangers of personal interest posed to politics and not merely a woman being in power.

Despite originating in Ancient Rome, or at least being prevalent in its politics, this gender and sex-focused representation of women in chronicles, where their reported desire signals corruption and fear, carries over to other time periods, cultures, and empires.[23] Medieval European Christian authors, who followed Roman chroniclers like Tacitus, continued to use woman to represent political and ideological anxieties and wants, in part due to the religion gaining popularity among Roman elites and thus being influenced by the culture. However, the divide between men and women in such stories was not as clear as it was in Roman chronicles because both male and female genders shared power differently in medieval Christian kingdoms than in Rome. For, as Theresa Earenfight has pointed out, medieval European rulership comprises a multiplicity of power relationships in which male and female rulers are inextricably linked by political theory and shared concerns; essentially, both men and women share power in medieval European monarchy.[24] While Earenfight discusses instances in which female rulers

[23] Joshel, 78.
[24] Theresa Earenfight, "Without the Persona of the Prince: Kings, Queens and the Idea of Monarchy in Late Medieval Europe," *Gender & History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 10.

could rule almost independently, this thesis focuses on the more widespread instance of queens acting as mediators for kings. Queens used their influence over kings and royal networks to serve as intermediaries between the people and their king. Rather than go directly to the king for certain requests like asking for a punishment to be repealed or property to be returned, petitioners would contact the queen instead and ask her to request these things from the king on their behalf. This process gave the queen her own power because she became someone subjects depended on for their well-being. Subsequently, sexual slander about queens could express the people's concern about the queen's mediating role as well as or instead of their concern about her husband's power or her own actual behavior. We see this dynamic in accusations about Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Rumors and Eleanor of Aquitaine

European chroniclers of the medieval period followed a similar trend to those of Roman and Byzantine time. As arguably one of the most prominent women in medieval Europe and an excellent mediator queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine was commonly used to portray author anxieties and ideas in regard to government.[25] Scholars, specifically Peggy McCracken, have written extensively on the connection between author anxiety and the depictions of Eleanor in stories and chronicles. Eleanor often featured in many fictional stories and chronicles both during and after her lifetime. These accounts were repeatedly adapted over time, resulting in more tales about Eleanor existing than factual evidence like charters and letters. These stories have been referred to as Black Legends because they mostly malign Eleanor's character and reputation as queen of France and England – a consequence of powerful queens often being unfavorably depicted by male authors either to critique the king she was married to or to express anxiety.

[25] Robert L. Chapman, "A Note on the Demon Queen Eleanor," *Modern Language Notes* 70, no. 6 (1955): 393-396.

What that anxiety was varied from author to author as they all existed in different time periods and countries. For instance, a writer from France during Eleanor's lifetime would be upset about weakness resulting from loss of her land when she divorced Louis VII while one in England a century later would be more concerned with the ruling of her descendants. Regardless of the specific reasons behind each individual author's fears, all their anxieties generally related to instability; the fears were about larger societal changes. Women like Eleanor having power was to male authors indicative of instability and change since they viewed influential women as unpredictable.[26]

Perceived erraticism in the behavior of a queen would impact not just the king but the entire country for marriage played a key role in establishing political stability. In the twelfth century, marriage amongst aristocrats affected more than just the individuals involved. Through marriage alliances between countries were made, doweries were exchanged to help boost a groom's family wealth, titles were granted, and more. Accordingly, divorce had a greater, wide-reaching impact that could cost many people – for instance, a country losing an alliance could lead to war that then kills soldiers. During the time in which Eleanor lived, divorce was mostly only granted on grounds of consanguinity, or religiously unacceptably close blood relation. Essentially, couples had to be seven times removed from a common ancestor in order to be lawfully wed under the eyes of the church.[27] However, aristocrats often disregarded this rule because there were a limited number of eligible partners from noble families and many nobles were related. A sort of window thus emerged where the elite could marry someone of close

[26] Joanna L. Laynesmith, "Telling Tales of Adulterous Queens in Medieval England: From Olympias of Macedonia to Elizabeth Woodville," in *Every Inch a King; Comparative Studies in Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Lynette Mitchel (Brill: 2012), 194-214.
[27] Constance B. Bouchard, "Consanguinity and Noble Marriages in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Speculum* 56, no. 2 (1982): 268-287.

relation and then divorce them on the grounds of said relation. Nobles often took advantage of this rule to get out of unfavorable marriages, and Eleanor and Louis VII were no exception.

Yet, Eleanor and Louis VII's separation was different from those of other nobles of the time period as it carried a heavier political impact. Eleanor and Louis were not merely aristocrats, but royal rulers – the example upon which all other couplings were based due to them always being in the limelight. In addition to having more attention placed on them, Eleanor and Louis had the ability to cause political change due to their position as rulers and the great amount of power they wielded through their collective wealth. Eleanor, specifically, had a lot of power in her own right due to her status as heiress to Aquitaine, a land that constituted a third of France at the time, as well as being queen. As the sole surviving child of Count William X of Aquitaine, Eleanor inherited the entire region, and the wealth that accompanied the land, at the young age of ten, giving her more freedom and power than most – both men and women. [28] Whoever married her would gain control over Aquitaine and the power it came with, for land belonging to wives went to their husbands upon marriage, giving husbands more wealth and resources upon which to draw. As king of France, Louis VII greatly relied on the resources from Aquitaine; the land made the kingdom he ruled larger and stronger. Divorcing Eleanor entailed losing Aquitaine and thus weakening France. In addition, Aquitaine would strengthen whoever Eleanor married, possibly giving power to an enemy country. Thus, the separation of Eleanor and Louis not only affected the couple, but the entire country and its inhabitants. More censure was given to Louis and Eleanor's separation than other divorces of the time as a result. Hence, the period right before the pivotal divorce is given great attention by medieval authors for it provides a focal point that authors can indicate as the reason for later political events.

[28] Frank McMinn Chambers, "Some Legends Concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 4, no. 16 (1941): 459.

Since medieval chroniclers reported that Eleanor first asked for a divorce during a visit to Antioch in the Second Crusade, the events that transpired there play a central role in subsequent rumors about her infidelity. Essentially, the simplest version of events reported is as follows: In 1148, Eleanor accompanied Louis VII to Antioch where her uncle Raymond of Poitiers resided. During the visit, Raymond asked Louis VII for help in the conquest of Aleppo and Caesarea, but the king denied the request as he wanted to continue his journey to Jerusalem. As a result, Raymond appealed to his niece who then tried to argue on his behalf, requesting the king stay in Antioch longer to help Raymond rather than go to Jerusalem, the epitome of the king's holy journey, as planned. Louis still refused, disappointing Eleanor. Some accounts say she asked for a divorce then and there.[29]

In asking Louis to reconsider his position on helping Raymond, Eleanor was acting within her queenly role as mediator, intervening on Raymond's behalf – something she was trained to do from a young age. Royal daughters were prepared from childhood to weave peace between their birth families and the families they married into.[30] Royal mothers would teach their daughters how to intervene with their father in order to prepare them for being wives and mothers of kings themselves. They did this because unlike men whose places in the world were defined by membership to a single patrilinear family, a woman's place was in multiple family allegiances due to marriage. As John Carmi Parsons wrote, "women's passages from one family to another, from one stage of family life to another-daughter, wife, mother, widow-distinguished their lives from men's."[31] Royal women experienced these passages in exaggerated manner because they would cross geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries in addition to

[29] John Carmi Parsons, "Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power: Some Plantagenet Evidence, 1150-1500," In *Medieval Queenship*, edited by John Carmi Parsons (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1998), 63-78.
[30] Ibid, 63-78.
[31] Ibid, 78.

changing families. Since they agreed to marry and travel to new families due to parental pressures, royal women believed that they chose such fates which placed value on their consent to their parents. They were rewarded with approval for doing what their parents wanted in agreeing to marry into new families. In choosing to cross cultural, geographical, and linguistic boundaries in order to help their families form allegiances, queens took great power in their roles as mediators. A queen's power was subsequently connected to her position within the families to whom she owed allegiance. Eleanor's ideas of self and authority were thus interconnected with her role as mediator between Raymond and Louis. Louis dismissing Eleanor's intervention could very well have been interpreted as dismissing Eleanor herself, for her role as mediator and sense of self were likely one and the same.

Perhaps because as heiress to Aquitaine, she controlled the resources Louis lost in the divorce, chroniclers tended to blame Eleanor alone for the divorce rather than both her and Louis VII. This is evident in their emphasis of her relationship to her uncle Raymond of Poitiers during her and Louis VII's visit to Antioch while on crusade. In the chronicles, Eleanor is said to have had an affair with Raymond, twisting an above board situation into something insidious. This affair is portrayed as the reason she asks for a divorce – not anything Louis VII does. In reality, her request for a divorce was the result of her role as mediator not being recognized; Louis dismissed her request to help Raymond, which she made in her role as queen. Eleanor was responsible for negotiating peace but did not have the power to enforce any agreements she negotiated – that power was Louis's. She had to subsequently be clever by convincing those with real power to follow her requests.[32]

[32] Tracy Adams, *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 77.

However, doing so was not always possible due to a queen's dual role. The mediator queen united two families in her own person, meaning she personified an alliance. To her family, she represented an inside contact to new allies while she also represented an outsider for her married family. A queen thus faced danger from all sides, even her own birth family. She was not sent into a foreign culture to be absorbed without a trace but to return her family's investment by providing information, getting her new husband to act in their best interests, etc. On the other hand, the queen also served as the focus for any hostility her married family might have toward her birth family. Ensuring peace was thus necessary for a queen to secure her own safety. It is not surprising, therefore, that Eleanor asked for a divorce because Louis was preventing her from doing the very duty that made her queen and risking her safety in addition to power and sense of self in the process.

The king does not want a divorce in the stories and always denies her request, taking her forcefully with him to Jerusalem away from Antioch and her uncle. As a point of discord between the king and queen, their visit to Antioch took on fictitious elaborations in which chroniclers transformed Eleanor's support for her uncle into a scandalous affair that caused her separation from Louis. Thus, chroniclers shift blame for the royal divorce onto Eleanor's own desires and subsequently the queen herself. Focusing on the stories that pertain to Eleanor and Raymond thus provides insight into the anxieties and attitudes of authors about Eleanor herself and the effect queens had in politics through their marriage to male leaders. For, as other historical studies have suggested, the increase in sexist attacks on women, which made them

seem to lose esteem, can be read instead as evidence of an increase in the number of women who had access to political power through mediation.[33]

That stories about Eleanor having committed adultery while on the Second Crusade are more pernicious than those that pertain to other periods of her life, such as the rumors about her murdering Henry II's mistress, suggests that a great deal of author anxiety about Eleanor related to the mediator power she wielded. In the context of this paper, author anxiety refers to the fear male writers of chronicles had regarding the rule of kings and queens which in turn affected the way they depicted certain individuals within their stories. Rumors of Eleanor's infidelity not only related to author anxieties about the woman herself, however, but also other queens having choices and desires that differed from their husbands and families. The chronicler's insistence on her overwhelming adulterous desire and the specific ways in which her desire is shown to be scandalous in chronicles indicate that Eleanor was not just seen as a villain of history but the emblem of the dangers of a queen's sexual intimacy with the king.[34]

In "Scandalizing Desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Chroniclers," Peggy McCracken analyzes the stories of twelfth-century chroniclers that suggest Eleanor had an affair while visiting Antioch during the Second Crusade in relation to gender, showing how they all try to explain the visit and the royal divorce that eventually followed it with reference to what Eleanor wanted, ultimately shifting the blame to her. Even though such accounts of chroniclers do not offer historically reliant information about Eleanor herself, their representation of her and their scandalization of her desire, or separate will from her husband, might say something about the

[33] Miriam Shadis and Hoffman Berman, "A Taste of the Feast: Reconsidering Eleanor of Aquitaine's Female Descendants," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John C. Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
[34] Peggy McCracken, "Scandalizing Desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Chroniclers," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John C. Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

institution of queenship in medieval Western Europe during the twelfth century. As McCracken writes, ""The ways in which the story of Eleanor's adultery is recounted, revised, and elaborated may speak some of the anxieties about gender, sexuality, and sovereignty that continually surfaced in medieval definitions of queenship."[35] When looked at through the lens of gender, according to McCracken, the scandalous desire represented in chroniclers' accounts of Eleanor's visit to Antioch seem to cover a related anxiety about the power she enjoyed as the king's sexual partner. They express fear by showing someone so close to the king, with a significant amount of influence over affairs, being fickle with sexual partners and having wandering desires; after all, if a woman can be so capricious with whom she sleeps, what is there to stop her from being unreliable in what she influences the king to do? Subsequently, according to McCracken, the rumors of infidelity that surround Eleanor in chronicles pertain to political fear; for, the queen's ability to influence her husband's government is a manifestation of political influence. Historians of medieval queenship have shown that such influence was openly recognized. This anxiety surely contributed to the representation of queens like Eleanor whose transgressive desire is shown to present a threat to their husbands, villainizing them and portraying them as subject to their changeable whims. Thus, authors had a fear of female persuasion, which queens had through both sex and mediation.

Hence, the scandalous desire represented in chroniclers' accounts of Eleanor's visit to Antioch cover a related anxiety about the power she enjoyed. This anxiety surely contributed to the depiction of Eleanor, as well as other queens, whose transgressive desire is shown to present a threat to her husbands, villainizing her and portraying her as subject to her changeable whims – traits that the real-life queen unlikely had. Of course, not all queens' having power was viewed

[35]McCracken.

as a threat on the king or else marriage would not have been a celebrated institution full of ritual in medieval Europe. Instead, the queen's influence (as a political figure) was acceptable so long as it aligned with the desires of the king. McCracken argues that as long as the queen acted as medieval society's ideal of the perfect wife, one who submitted to the will of her husband and focused on family only, her influence was not perceived as a threat. "But when – through the king's excessive desire and the queen's transgressive expression of desire – it escapes the functions scripted by royal rituals of intercession and succession, it may be seen to threaten the king's sovereignty, particularly if the queen is a wealthy sovereign in her own right."[36] As an heiress of a large portion of France and a strong-willed, ambitious woman, Eleanor was far outside these parameters.

The insistence of Eleanor's adulterous desire and the specific ways in which her desire is shown to be scandalous in chronicles indicate that Eleanor was not just a villain of history but the emblem of the dangers of a queen's power when separate from the king. Since Eleanor's land transferred to her husband,[37] the queen's power was defined in terms of her sexuality as her choice of sexual partner directly affected who owned her lands and the assets it provided as well as who she mediated for. Therefore, the rumors about her scandalous desire not only pertained to anxiety about her influence over the king but the ability she had to give her land, and the power and wealth it brought, to any man of her choosing according to McCracken. Her scandalous desire is told by chroniclers as a displaced representation of cultural anxiety about queenship and as a cautionary tale that shows the queen's power to corrupt government as a harmful sexual

[36] McCracken.
[37] Katherine L. French and Allyson M. Poska, "Women in the Early and High Middle Ages, 400-1200" in *Women and Gender in the Western Past Vol. 1* (Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

desire, subsequently creating the perception that she needs to be controlled and kept from falling prey to her own wants. At least, this is the case when using McCracken's theory.

However, McCracken's argument fails to consider Eleanor's role as mediator and how her perceived abandonment of it may have affected author anxiety. By encouraging her sons to rebel against Henry II for the throne of England, Eleanor separated herself from her husband and thus effectively gave up her position to mediate between the people, including her children, and the king. As already mentioned, such a role was integral to medieval rulership as without a queen subjects were less likely to appeal to the king or change his mind about specific rulings. Whereas usually there is a queen to intercede if the king decides to rescind property from a church or arrest a specific person, for example, in Eleanor's case there was not once she sided with her sons. This left English subjects more vulnerable to the whims of their king – ironic since chronicles always made the queen's supposed capriciousness what individuals should fear when in fact it was the king's volatility that could cause the most issues – and thus invoked a lot of political anxiety. Eleanor subsequently was seen more as in the wrong by her subjects upon joining her sons' rebellion against their father and encouraged to return to her husband and rightful place as mediator. Analysis of letters sent to Eleanor before, during, and after the rebellion reveal that public attitude toward her took a sour turn, showing such the decline was directly related to Eleanor's role, or lack thereof, as mediator for Henry II. Thus, Eleanor's perceived abandonment of her queenly duty as mediator also affected political anxieties and very well could have contributed to the scandalous way she was depicted later on in chronicles.

Methodology

The letters used for analysis in this paper come from the *Epistolae* collection of medieval Latin letters to and from women. This collection was put together by Dr. Joan Ferrante, Professor

Emerita of English and Comparative Literature of Columbia University, who, with her colleagues, collected and translated these letters mainly from printed sources. The letters they collected date from the fourth to the thirteenth centuries, and they are presented in their original Latin as well as in English translation.[38] Sadly, there are not a lot of surviving letters that were sent to Eleanor of Aquitaine in this collection – or in general. There are only twelve in total to look at, including four from around the time period of Eleanor and her sons' rebellion, which will be the letters analyzed here. While scholars have analyzed these letters before, such as H. G. Richardson in 1959, who read through letters and charters of Eleanor to show the misconceptions about Eleanor that arose from false rumors,[39] none have looked specifically at how the letters connect to the public perception of Eleanor's *mediator* role. How do these letters address Eleanor differently, and how could the change in addressing her be the result of her own actions at the time? More specifically, how do the letters change after Eleanor leaves Henry II to help her sons' rebellion?

Of course, there are complications with relying on letters for analysis. For one, the letters are biased and limited to the writer's perspective. They reflect what the author thought and believed at the time, but not anyone else (at least for certain). As mentioned before, Eleanor's reputation among her contemporaries is difficult to ascertain because both twelfth and thirteenth as well as nineteenth and twentieth-century biographers tend to blur history and legend.[40] Each group subsequently dithers between vehement praise and vilification based on weak evidence. The writings perpetuate rumors or opinions more than facts as a result. Moreover, as Fiona

[38] My analysis is based upon the English translations.
[39] H. G. Richardson, "The Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine" in *The English Historical Review* 74, no. 291 (1959): 193–213.
[40] F. Tolhurst, "What Ever Happened to Eleanor? Reflections of Eleanor of Aquitaine in Wace's *Roman de Brut* and Lawman's *Brut,*" in *Eleanor of Aquitaine Lord and Lady* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York: 2003).

Tolhurst points out in her article on how the portrayal of Queen Guenevere in stories and plays shifted drastically due to Eleanor's own reputation declining in annals and chronicles, more inaccuracies about Eleanor have arisen from the assumption that Eleanor can be shown to have only played a role in governmental matters if her name appears on charters or other documents. This assumption affected which documents and letters were looked at more seriously by scholars, such as H. G. Richardson who wrote extensively on the surviving documents of Eleanor in her role as chancellor but not when her mediator position[41], and thus which were translated and preserved until the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

However, the very biases that complicate analysis are what will be looked at when investigating Eleanor's letters. What are the biases presented and how do they affect what is written to Eleanor? What do the biases tell us the reader about how the author perceived Eleanor? What influenced the authors to have such a bias? As McCracken, and also Tolhurst, argue, the answer is fear. Yet, fear of what? McCracken says authors are anxious about Eleanor's influence over the king and the power she had in her own right as heiress to Aquitaine. Tolhurst states that Eleanor's declining reputation from the turn of the thirteenth century onward is owed to increased clerical venom against women with political power just as much as the events of her life. After all, why else would medieval chroniclers depict feminine power as a threat to both church and state if not because the church was also concerned about women who held authority? While Tolhurst admits that Eleanor's possible encouragement of her sons' rebellions could also have contributed to her worsened reputation, Tolhurst states that it will never be known for sure because accounts of the degree to which Eleanor influenced her sons vary. Yet, neither Tolhurst or McCracken discuss how Eleanor's role as mediator, or in this case abandonment, since she did

[41] H. G. Richardson, "The Letters and Charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine" in *The English Historical Review* 74, no. 291 (1959): 193–213.

get imprisoned by Henry II for involvement in the rebellion regardless of what level of complicity she actually had, could have also influenced such vitriol against her from the church.

Thus, although lacking in quantity, the letters from *Epistolae* are a good resource to look at for figuring out how Eleanor's role as mediator affected her declined reputation after her sons' rebellion and gave rise to the rumors about her. Since this thesis is focused on how people perceived Eleanor in relation to her role as mediator, only letters sent *to* Eleanor are being analyzed. Each of the letters that will be discussed were sent by individuals who had a great array of influence at the time: abbots, archbishops, and even the pope. These were types of individuals who others listened to regarding how to behave and what to think about others, because they literally were the moral compass of the time.[42] They represented God's will to the public, and subsequently wielded quite a bit of power over how people acted and how they perceived each other. As a result, the beliefs expressed in these letters were more likely to be held by many people rather than just those writing.

Letter Analysis

A letter from around 1144 to 1147 from abbot Bernard of Clairvaux gives an indication of what Eleanor's reputation was as queen before she divorced Louis VII and married Henry II. At the time the letter was written, she was still queen of France and about to leave for the Second Crusade. In the letter, the abbot asks Eleanor to return the possessions she revoked from a servant Wicardus whom she exiled. He joined the clergy afterward, and then he requested his items back through Bernard.

> HAVING NO TRUST that our insignificance holds any notice or familiarity before your dignity, but rather in your most famous generosity and kindness, do we offer you our

[42] Katherine L. French and Allyson M. Poska, "Women in the Early and High Middle Ages, 400-1200" in *Women and Gender in the Western Past Vol. 1* (Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

> petitions. Wicardus, one of your men, complains of you; that while in your household, from which, although he feels that he is not at fault, having been unjustly deprived by you of all his possessions, he was forced into exile. Since we know that this man has a good intention, namely to leave the world and turn to the Lord, we think it not inappropriate either that we should request of you, nor that you should agree, to restore to him your favor by giving back either all or some of his possessions. We also commend to you, if yet we should find some favor in your eyes, this religious man, namely the abbot of Beaulieu, who for this purpose has taken the trouble, travelling from far off to you, to tire himself with this letter of ours. Therefore, see to it that he has not been tired out in vain.

In the letter, Bernard appeals to Eleanor's reputation as "just" and "generous" in order to get her to change her mind on seizing Wicardus's belongings. He even asks that she not waste the messenger's time by disregarding the request because doing so would be rude or unqueenly. His word choice is very deliberate because queens with good reputations amongst the public were often seen to be merciful and fair. Eleanor would want to be known for those characteristics, especially before making the unprecedented choice to accompany her husband on crusade. Leaving her daughter, which she had to do to travel with Louis VII, would not have been met well by the public.[43] While kings were seen mostly as political heads, queens were described through life stage roles such as wife, mother, widow. This distinction is often what separated men from women in medieval Europe.[44] Queens had to be good wives and mothers to be seen as effective queens, especially in terms of their mediator roles because they were often the intermediary for their families. If a queen was not a good wife, then why would her husband

[43] Fiona Harris-Stoertz, "Young Women in France and England: 1050-1300," 22-46.
[44] John Carmi Parsons, "Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power: Some Plantagenet Evidence, 1150-1500."

listen to her and change his rulings? Thus, a queen had to have a good reputation with the men in her life to be an effective mediator and have influence of her own. A king would not listen to a wife who neglected his heirs, though, which is why motherhood and perception of her parenting were important to Eleanor as well. She needed to be seen as a good mother to be viewed as a decent wife in order to be perceived as a queen who could effect change with her king husband. Bernard targets this need in order to persuade Eleanor to return Wicardus's belongings by using the very terms Eleanor requires to be described as to maintain power.

However, if Eleanor was viewed to be obstinate or immutable, Bernard would not have even attempted to change her mind with his letter. The letter essentially asks her to admit she was mistaken in her decision to take Wicardus's property and apologize through the action of returning his items. This very request indicates that Eleanor was known to be somewhat flexible, or at least willing to change her mind on some stances. Being known to be reasonable probably helped Eleanor's standing as mediator because she showed herself to be someone capable of persuasion when necessary. If Eleanor were not seen as such, people like Bernard would not have approached her in the first place or gone to her to influence her husband to change his mind on matters. This letter from Bernard thus shows that Eleanor was viewed to be rational and a capable mediator for her king husband early in her reign, especially by the clergy.

As Henry II's wife in England, Eleanor continued to be seen by clergymen as someone they could appeal to. In fact, they requested her to act on their behalf when the king acted in unbeneficial ways toward them or their church. This dynamic can be clearly seen in a letter correspondence from 1153, one year after Eleanor and Henry married, where Anastasius IV, the pope until his death 1153, asks Eleanor to help with Henry, who was not yet king, in a church-state conflict over the removal and replacement of an abbot of St. Michael. The pope pleads:

> Our beloved son, Richard, abbot of St. Michael "in danger of the sea" (Mont Saint Michel) who came to the mercy of the apostolic see, fully demonstrated the violence and injury which he had long suffered from your husband, the duke of the Normans, to our predecessor of holy memory, pope Eugene [III], and to us, who have been put in his place by the disposition of the Lord [in 1153].

Anastasius uses harsh terms to describe Henry II's actions such as "violence" and "injury" which portray the king to be harming the abbot in question as well as St. Michael as a whole. He even says that they are "long suffered", suggesting that Henry's actions are damaging and on-going. The letter paints Henry in a harsh light by saying he has perpetrated violence and injury onto the abbot for a lengthy period of time. Anastasius's use of the term "violent" is not surprising. The church often supported aristocratic women in their attempts to limit men's violence, which is why court culture came into being by the twelfth century.[45] Through using such a term, Anastasius is deliberately conveying that Eleanor, in contrast, is not violent and should thus act accordingly, As a means of directing her action, he explains to her what he has done:

> Recognizing that his cause is supported by justice and reason, we have confirmed him in the abbacy of the foresaid monastery, with God as author, and we have absolved from the chain of excommunication the one who was intruded into his place through the power of your husband, with the oath taken that ought to be by our mandate, and we have ordered that he should presume in no way to trouble that abbot under the charge of that oath.

Here, Anastasius is portraying himself and St. Michael as the victims in order to garner sympathy from Eleanor. He even describes himself and the abbot in question as being supported

[45] Katherine L. French and Allyson M. Poska, "Women in the Early and High Middle Ages, 400-1200" in *Women and Gender in the Western Past Vol. 1* (Houghton Mifflin, 2007) 164.

by “justice and reason” – the opposite of Henry’s violence and injury. Anastasius continues to claim that their actions are supported by God, which implies that Henry’s, the king, are not. By using such language, Anastasius is trying to separate Eleanor from her husband’s opinion. If she does not want to be against God, which as a Christian queen she would not as that would affect how people see her and thus limit her own political influence, then she must side with Anastasius and the abbot he has installed and not with her husband.

This attempt at separating Eleanor from Henry is further apparent in the discrepancy of language Anastasius uses in describing Henry and Eleanor.

> Since there is a participant of mercy, who shows [her]self a helper in good works, we command, admonish, and exhort your nobility by these writings in the Lord that you strive to suggest to your renowned husband, the duke, diligently and efficaciously that he permit that abbot to return to his monastery in peace and carry out his office in the regular way and do no harm to him about anything or permit harm to be done by his men. Which if he do not, we cannot fail in justice to this abbot and the foresaid duke should fear lest he feel the grave vengeance of St. Peter over it.

While Henry is violent and causing suffering, Eleanor is invited to be a “participant of mercy, who shows [her]self a helper in good works.” By describing Eleanor in the same terms as he describes himself and his church, Anastasius is consigning the queen to his side. They are both merciful and blessed by God, so they thus must have the same desire to let the abbot return to his monastery free from Henry’s wrath as that is what God would want; otherwise, the king and queen will suffer “grave vengeance of St. Peter”. This very attempt at aligning Eleanor to Athanasius’ desires proves how influential Eleanor was seen to be as a mediator. Anastasius would not be trying to persuade Eleanor so vehemently if she did not possess any influence over

Henry to stop his actions. He especially would not appeal to the very trait most often associated with queens as merciful mediators if Eleanor herself was not seen as such (a queen and mediator). Subsequently, because of her influence over her husband, Anastasius encourages Eleanor to separate herself from the king's actions and argue against them on behalf of St. Michael and the abbot. He would not have bothered if he believed she could achieve no aid.

Yet, Eleanor being able to have separate opinions from her husband was not always seen as a positive amongst her peers. According to a 1154-70 letter from Hildegard of Bingen, an abbess who later became a German saint, Eleanor publicly differed from her husband more often than usual for a queen. Hildegard accuses:

> Your mind is like a wall which is covered with clouds, and you look everywhere but have no rest. Flee this and attain stability with God and men, and God will help you in all your tribulations. May God give you his blessing and help in all your works.

Hildegard writes about how Eleanor's mind wanders and that she is restless, suggesting she is not seen as obedient to her husband perhaps. Why else tell Eleanor to find stability "with God and men" unless she is seen as having none – to go with men unless she is not already? This indicates Eleanor did not always agree or support her husband, that she did act individually. It is thus more than likely that Eleanor agreed to requests like those of Anastasius to appeal to Henry to change his mind or rulings on matters. She took her role as mediator seriously enough to oppose her husband on matters to benefit the people, or at least some individuals. That she acted to help the clergy is even more likely due to Hildegard's insistence that Eleanor stay with Henry. If Eleanor is helping clergymen and other religious figures, then it makes sense to surmise that more members of the church would want her to stay close to her king husband. Perhaps,

Hildegard is worried that Eleanor deviating from her husband too much is impeding Henry's willingness to listen, so the abbess is suggesting Eleanor be more agreeable so that Henry is more likely to listen when she does try to mediate.

In the archbishop Rotrud of Rouen's letter, though, a clear shift in Eleanor's reputation is apparent – at least for one bishop. Although there is no date for when the letter was written, the context – Rotrud demanding Eleanor return to her husband who is anguished over the betrayal of his sons - shows that it takes place at some point between Eleanor leaving Henry II to help her sons' rebellion and being imprisoned by her husband. Before discussing the letter, it will be beneficial to have some more background on the Revolt of 1173-74 itself. Before the rebellion, Henry II was doing well. He had conquered a vast territory that stretched from the Pyrenees to Hadrian's Wall and the king had just been reconciled with the church for the murder of Thomas Beckett.[46] However, Henry II's eldest son, Henry the Young, felt divested as his father had all this territory and power but was not distributing it amongst his adult sons. Young Henry complained about not being the head of a principality and lacking the wealth of his rank. Henry II seemed to have intended to concentrate the main power of his empire in his own hands to the detriment of the members of his family. As a result, Henry the Young fomented a rebellion with his mother Eleanor, or at least with her support.[47] Henry II had been interfering in Eleanor's governance of Aquitaine by this point, limiting her political power while also trying to separate himself a bit from her influence, which is why the queen was involved with her sons' rebellion.

Through her support of Henry the Young, who was later joined by two of his brothers Geoffrey and Richard, Eleanor got other powers involved in the rebellion. Not only did her

[46] Martin Aurell, "Political Culture and Medieval Historiography: The Revolt Against King Henry II, 1173–1174" (2017) 754.
[47] Ibid, 755.

maternal uncle, Raoul de Châtellerault, aid the young royals, but so did Louis VII, Eleanor's former husband as well as several French barons. Subsequently, Eleanor's involvement, regardless of what degree that involvement was, greatly impacted the revolt through adding powerful supporters and their wealth to the effort. Her ceasing her support of her sons' efforts would probably have led to their French backers withdrawing their aid to the revolt and put an end to it. However, Eleanor did not back down, which resulted in her sixteen year imprisonment after the rebellion failed.

During the revolt, members of the church were divided on who to support. For example, Robert of Torigni, abbot of Mont Saint Michel, was close to the king and praised Henry II's dynasty in exchange for his protection of Mont Saint Michel. Meanwhile, Richard le Poitevin, a monk of Cluny, favored Eleanor. Even fifty years after the revolt, some church members scorned Henry II for his actions like Matthew Paris, a monk of St Albans.[48] However, Richard and Matthew were the exceptions; the majority of the chroniclers and clergy supported Henry II, which includes Rotrud. While in previous letters from church officials Eleanor is given praise and gently encouraged to be on the side of God by opposing Henry II, Rotrud tells Eleanor that she is going against God by being physically separated from Henry II.

> It is publicly known and no Christian may ignore it, that the conjugal bond is firm and indissoluble. Truth, which can not lie, decreed that matrimony once begun can not be separated: whom God, it said, joined, let no man put separate. Just as he made him a transgressor of the divine mandate who separates a married couple, so a married person is guilty who separates herself from her husband and does not observe the faith of the social

[48] Ibid 757.

> bond. Since married people are made one flesh, it is necessary that unity of spirits be joined to union of bodies.

Eleanor is not divorcing Henry II, nor does she ever try to, so Rotrud's language choice is interesting when he states that "the conjugal bond is firm and indissoluble." All Eleanor is doing at this point is supporting her sons' attempt to overthrow Henry II from the throne. She did not go to the pope for a divorce like she did with Louis VII upon their return from crusade. In fact, considering Eleanor was already very famously divorced from Louis VII before marrying Henry II decades before, it is peculiar that Rotrud claims marriage is permanent to Eleanor of all people. He knows that she has already been divorced, and thus that marriage, at least to Eleanor, is not lasting. By Rotrud's own logic, therefore, Eleanor is not married to Henry II at all because she was wed to Louis VII first, which completely invalidates his point that she must return to Henry's side. This lack in logic and disregard for Eleanor's well-known past, conveys just how upset Rotrud, and consequently the church, was by Eleanor removing herself physically from Henry II. Physically because she made no attempt to dissolve the marriage and Rotrud emphasizes the importance of bodies in his letter. Rotrud was desperate, for lack of a better word, enough to get Eleanor back into Henry II's good graces try that he tries to convince a woman who has already been divorced that divorce is not obtainable or moral.

> That woman who is not subject to her husband voids the condition of nature, the mandate of the apostle, and the law of the gospel. For man (1) is the head of woman; woman is taken from man, united to man, subject to the power of man.

Rotrud's emphasis on woman being subject to man is also intriguing because past letters to Eleanor suggest that she was often encouraged to side with opinions other than her husband's

will in order to advocate for subjects and the church when they did not agree with Henry's actions. Eleanor thus had the difficult task as queen of influencing her husband as mediator in order to enact her own political desires without pushing so far that she went beyond the societal limits placed on women as wives and mothers – in other words, she could not be seen as being insubordinate to the men in her life while actually exerting authority of her own through those very men. Yet, when Eleanor is no longer in a position to speak for these differing views or requests, suddenly her being separate or thinking for herself "voids the condition of nature." This switch in opinion is indicative of how McCracken argues authors conveyed their own political anxieties by blaming queens through scandalous desire in chronicles. When politics or government are in a manner the author approves of, the women are depicted as faithful and good wives. They positively influence their husbands, but not in an erratic or harmful manner. Yet, once upheaval occurs or the women demonstrate more power than the authors are comfortable with, the queens in the stories become licentious and capricious, causing havoc for the king and his citizens. The same can be said to be occurring for Eleanor in these letters. Initially, while beside the king and able to influence him, Eleanor having a separate opinions is seen as beneficial because then she can act as mediator for others. However, as soon as she loses the kings favor by very publicly rejecting his rule and physically separating herself, thus making her unable to influence the king or act as mediator, Eleanor's previously praised individualism becomes a trait to be admonished.

Furthermore, Rotrud's letter explicitly states that Eleanor's marriage to Henry II affects everyone in the kingdom.

> For we know that unless you return to your husband, you will be the cause of general ruin and what you now abandon singly will be turned to common expense. Return, therefore,

> illustrious queen, to your husband and our lord, so that by your reconciliation rest may be restored to those who labor and by your return, happiness may return to all. If our prayers do not move you to this, may the affliction of peoples, the threatened oppression of the church, the desolation of the kingdom stir you.

The archbishop says that Eleanor will cause "general ruin" by leaving Henry II physically, which is a lot of pressure to put on a queen. That her singular actions will come at the expense of the common people. He directly implies Eleanor leaving her role as mediator to Henry II will cause havoc for the rest of England, which was possibly a very true claim. Without Eleanor there to influence Henry to change his mind, there was no one else the people could go to argue their case. Queens were expected to appeal to mercy to kings through their role as wives and mothers to his children, and in Eleanor's case she was quite successful in this role. No other person in Henry II's life had such an effective position or leverage. Thus, Eleanor leaving Henry did leave some individuals, specifically members of the church, without someone to appeal toward if Henry did not rule in their favor. Rotrud's claim that happiness would return if Eleanor went back to Henry could be referencing her effective mediator position with the king. If she were by his side and able to appeal again, then for those individuals she was appealing for, happiness would result; whereas, if she does not return, those people would not have as useful of an avenue to beseech the king and would not be happy.

Based on Rotrud's letter, as well as the others analyzed, it is not implausible that Eleanor's reputation directly correlated to her role as mediator. While in a position to influence Henry II, she was appealed to and praised by clergymen and subjects. She was written to be fair and dependable, at least to a certain extent. Yet, as soon as Eleanor physically left Henry, she is berated and told to go back. Rotrud threatened that the public would suffer if she did not, and to

a certain extent he was right. Eleanor did not return until after the rebellion failed, subsequently becoming imprisoned for sixteen years and unable to influence Henry in a positive manner again. Thus, for sixteen years, the public did not have someone to appeal to Henry on their behalf, which probably made life more difficult for them as well. Eleanor leaving Henry was also her abandoning her role as mediator; she gave up her power with him in pursuit of more through her sons and failed. Eventually, Eleanor did regain her role and more influence than she had before once Henry died and her sons took over the throne, but at the cost of other people's suffering and having no one to plea on their behalf when the king ruled against them. This greatly decreased her popularity, and very well could be a cause for the infidelity rumors that arose about her later on.

Conclusion

The analysis of the letters sent to Eleanor before and during her sons' revolt shows that Eleanor's mediator role very well could have contributed to her later depictions as adulterous. A lot of power was given to Eleanor through her position to Henry II. She was asked to appeal on the behalf of clergymen to Henry II, and clearly had some success because the requests continued. However, removing herself from Henry's side seems to have had a negative effect on her own reputation. While she was previously praised for being fair and just by Anastasius and Bernard who wrote to her when she was influential and before the 1173-1174 revolt, Hildegard and Rotrud are not so kind in their letters that were written after Eleanor's power declined. Even before the revolt, Henry was distancing himself from Eleanor – both politically and geographically as he did send her away more. Eleanor no longer had the same level of influence as mediator as she once had, so she decided to get closer to her sons instead as evidenced by her

support in their rebellion to overthrow Henry and her subsequent reign as regent once Richard I took the throne years later.

However, church officials saw this shift in focus as an abandonment of her role as mediator to the king. Hildegard and Rotrud both tell Eleanor to return to her husband, signifying they did not support her changing loyalty. A reason why they did not support it is Eleanor's position as mediator. Of course, they could also not approve because they believed wives should stay married to their husbands, but as already discussed this was unlikely. Consanguinity was already an established method through which many nobles obtained divorce in the medieval era – a method approved by the church. Eleanor herself had already been divorced through consanguinity before marrying Henry II. Her separation from the French king was well known and widely accepted long before she supported her sons in rebelling against Henry. If Hildegard and Rotrud truly believed marriage was permanent and sacred, at least in Eleanor's case, they would have purported she was still wed to Louis VII or disavowed her second marriage to Henry II. Thus, it makes sense that instead they are more concerned with Eleanor's position to Henry II than the sanctity of their marriage itself. Eleanor had to be on good terms with Henry II in order to have any influence over him and be able to convince him to overturn certain decisions.

Subsequently, clergymen, the writers of chronicles, were more concerned about Eleanor's ability to fulfill her queenly role as mediator than her or Henry's personal happiness or political goals. Eleanor leaving Henry's side would have severely impacted his rule as Earenfight stated since monarchy is a multiplicity. Her mediatorship was a crucial element of England's government at the time. Thus, her supporting her sons against Henry was an abandonment of her role as mediator and an action that could have put government in turmoil. As a result, Eleanor's queenly reputation greatly declined. It was this decline that led to infidelity rumors, for the same

reason that caused Eleanor's reputation to plummet also had the potential to cause political upheaval and greatly affect the lives of church officials. Without someone to appeal to, clergy were forced to accept Henry's decisions even if they were against church or individual interests. This invoked anxiety which then led to infidelity rumors, as McCracken has proven the two are correlated.

However, unlike what McCracken argues, the infidelity rumors about Eleanor very well could actually have been caused by her abandonment of Henry and subsequently her mediator role rather than the influence she did exert over the king. As the letters suggest, individuals were very concerned about Eleanor's proximity to Henry II. They were not worried she was too close to the king, but not close enough. Clergymen encouraged Eleanor to stay close to Henry II, to return to him. If the church had anxiety over Eleanor's influence of Henry, then surely church members would not have tried so hard to convince the queen to remain in the very position that enabled her to have such power over the king. In fact, she had great influence since marrying Henry II, her wealth played a large part in Henry's ability to become king, so surely insecurities about her position would have arisen before her sons' revolt if they were strong enough to invoke the type of anxiety that led to infidelity rumors. Such rumors would have existed before Eleanor was imprisoned. Therefore, based on the letters and when Eleanor's reputation declined, it makes more sense that the aforementioned legends about Eleanor's adultery were the result of her leaving Henry's side and thus abandoning her queenly role as mediator more so than the influence she exerted over her husband.

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