

History

Lesson 1 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

## **Eleanor's Early Life**

Enquiry: What can the life of Eleanor of Aquitaine tell us about who held power in the Middle Ages?

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# Aquitaine

Aquitaine was the largest and richest land in France in the medieval period. Many people wanted to take control of its riches and people. In 1137 this became a possibility. The Duke of Aquitaine had died and control of Aquitaine passed to his eldest child - 13 year old Eleanor.



# Eleanor of Aquitaine

Eleanor of Aquitaine was the eldest child of the Duke of Aquitaine. When her father died in 1137 she **inherited** Aquitaine. Along with her good looks and intelligence, her new land made the teenage Eleanor a desired woman. Many men across medieval Europe wanted to marry her.



# Marriage to Louis VII, King of France

Shortly Eleanor was married to the future King of France, 17 year old Louis VII. This seemed like a good marriage for both Eleanor and Louis. As King of France Louis could offer to protect Eleanor's rights as the ruler of Aquitaine. Louis benefitted too because he got some control of the richest lands in France. This marriage made both Louis and Eleanor more powerful. The couple were young so there was also plenty of time for them to have to children who could inherit their thrones. However, the newly married couple were not well matched - Eleanor was energetic and intelligent whereas Louis VII was considered slow and lacked charm. Despite this, Louis VII was initially obsessed with his new wife and overlooked their differences.



# Marriage Problems

Louis VII took his Christian faith seriously and in 1147 Louis VII joined the Second Crusade to the **Holy Land**. Eleanor insisted on joining her husband and offered her support to help the Crusaders. The Crusade caused problems for the royal couple's marriage. Whilst the royal party travelled to the Holy Land in 1147 Eleanor and Louis spent little time together. This decision was made by Louis so that he would look like a good **pilgrim** and leader rather than a husband distracted by his wife. The couple began to grow apart and their differences became clear to everyone.



# Arrival in the Holy Land

The royal couple arrived in the Holy Land in late 1147. Now they were reunited in the city of **Antioch** they argued more than before. Eleanor regularly disagreed with the decisions made by Louis. Then in 1148 she publicly refused to go with him to Jerusalem, the holiest city in the Holy Land. She was eventually forced to go, but this argument signalled the end of their marriage. Louis was furious with her **disobedience**. He had been under pressure from his **barons** to end the marriage because they didn't like Eleanor and she hadn't provided Louis with a son. He began to listen to them.



# Royal Annulment

Their disagreements had become so bad that in 1149 the royal couple travelled back to France on separate ships. They visited the **Pope** in Rome on the way. The Pope was the only person who could grant an **annulment**. The Pope did not agree at first but eventually, in 1152 he agreed the marriage could end.

Thanks to an earlier agreement Eleanor was able to keep control of Aquitaine. She returned there as Duchess of Aquitaine, leaving her two daughters behind to be raised by King Louis.



# Glossary

**Annulment** - a decision that a marriage does not now exist because it was never legal

**Antioch** - city in the Holy Land

**Barons** - a senior lord who was often a close friend or relative of the king

**Disobedience** - behaviour in which someone refuses to do what someone in authority/power had told them to do

**Heir** - person who is legally given someone's money and possessions when they die

**Holy Land** - an area in the Middle East where events of the bible happened

**Inherited** - to receive possessions from someone who has died

**Pope** - the leader of the Roman Catholic Church



# Questions

1. When did Eleanor take control of Aquitaine?
2. Why did many men want to marry Eleanor?
3. Why was Eleanor's marriage to Louis seen as a good one?
4. What problems did the royal couple have whilst on Crusade?
5. Why did Louis and Eleanor's marriage come to an end in 1152?

