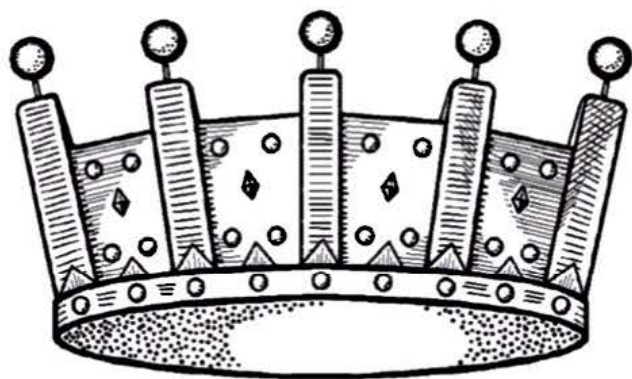


SICILIAN MEDIEVAL STUDIES

Queens of Sicily

1061-1266



The Queens Consort, Regent and Regnant
of the
Norman-Swabian Era
of the
Kingdom of Sicily

Jacqueline Alío

powerful women in Europe and the daughter of Henry I “Beauclerc,” fourthborn son of William the Conqueror.⁴⁴⁴

Thus Henry II was Norman on his mother’s side. His father, through whom he inherited lands in France, was Geoffrey V, Count of Anjou, who died in 1151. For this reason, Henry and his descendants are usually referred to in British historiography as *Angevins*. The term *Plantagenet*, though known, became popular somewhat later.⁴⁴⁵

Henry’s only wife, graceful Eleanor of Aquitaine, was about a decade older than the young king. As the heiress of the prosperous Duchy of Aquitaine, she was much desired. She wed, firstly, Louis VII of France in 1137. The marriage cannot be said to have been a happy one.

There may be some truth to the belief that the youthful bride was indecorous, even audacious, and ten years later she accompanied her husband on the misadventurous Second Crusade. At Constantinople, the chronicler Nicetas Choniates praised her beauty.

Eleanor’s sea voyage back to France was hindered by Byzantine assaults, and unforeseen storms blew her ship off course, possibly as far as the African coast, but she eventually made it to the port of Palermo at the end of July in 1149, ill but safe. Her husband’s galley, meanwhile, had landed in Apulia. King Roger II accompanied Eleanor to the mainland, where she was united with her husband. The two kings met at Potenza in late August. Roger then had the royal couple and their suite escorted to Tusculum to meet the pope.⁴⁴⁶

At Tusculum, Eleanor and Louis prevailed upon Pope Eugene III to grant an annulment of their marriage based on the pretext of close consanguinity through what was actually rather distant kinship. This was ridiculous considering the frequent marriages between royal cousins; it seems more likely that Louis was simply disappointed that Eleanor had

produced two daughters⁴⁴⁷ but no sons, for it was stipulated upon their marriage that he could not rule Aquitaine *jure uxoris* and that the duchy would be inherited only by a male heir. Nonetheless, the annulment was granted and in 1152 Eleanor wed the King of England, by whom she bore sons, beginning with William, who died young, and Henry, who lived into adulthood.⁴⁴⁸ The most significant result of this union, apart from the births of Henry's successors Richard and John, was that Aquitaine henceforth fell under Plantagenet rule. A great deal has been written about Eleanor, much of it flattering.⁴⁴⁹

Childhood

Images of Joanna depict her as a pretty blonde.⁴⁵⁰ Her childhood may be viewed as privileged, even by the royal standards of her time. Whereas her two elder half-sisters, Marie and Alix (Eleanor's daughters by Louis VII), remained at their father's court, Joanna and her two "full" sisters enjoyed the benefit of a close relationship with their mother. Every scrap of evidence suggests that Eleanor was a loving mother.⁴⁵¹

Marie and Alix were not Joanna's only half siblings, as Henry II fathered illegitimate children, notably Geoffrey of York and William Longespée.

Joanna's full siblings were William (who died young in 1156), Henry the Young King (who died in 1183), Matilda (Maude), Richard "Lionheart," Geoffrey, Leonor (Eleanor), and John "Lackland," who was born the year following Joanna.

Eleanor did not often see her eldest two daughters from her first marriage. Their father, Louis, may have brought them to visit her at Angers when he went there to meet Henry in April 1166, but this is not known with certainty.

Most of what we know of Joanna's childhood comes to us through our knowledge of her strong-willed mother's actions

For her safety (from the Messinians but perhaps also from Philip), Joanna was lodged at the monastery at Bagnara, across the strait in Calabria, where Richard left a small garrison to guard her. With this in mind, he had already ordered his engineers to fortify the abbey founded a century earlier by Roger I.⁵⁰¹

Richard's rapport with Philip, who had supported him in a series of battles against his own father, was growing strained, especially after Richard called off his planned marriage to Philip's half-sister, Alys. The English king was now planning to wed Berengaria of Navarre.

Tancred eventually paid Richard twenty thousand gold ounces for Joanna's dowry. Another twenty thousand was paid to accommodate Richard's other requests, though according to one chronicler this was ostensibly a dowry for Tancred's daughter, Elvira, to wed Richard's young nephew, Arthur of Brittany, whom Richard had declared heir presumptive to the English throne. This betrothal was never finalized; the contract for Elvira's dowry may have been little more than a ploy by Richard to justify his theft of Joanna's money.

Joanna's dower lands in Apulia were not restored to her, and Richard never gave her much of the remuneration remitted to him by Tancred.⁵⁰²

Richard accepted an invitation to meet Tancred at Catania, where the two monarchs made peace, sending a copy of their treaty to the pope. Then Richard returned to Messina and Tancred to Palermo. Much to the chagrin of the Messinians, the English and French armies wintered in Sicily.

On Christmas, Joanna attended Richard's lavish feast at Mategriffo.⁵⁰³ Philip of France, who was present, was already admiring the widow's beauty with an eye to marrying her.⁵⁰⁴

In March 1191, Philip set sail for Palestine while Richard crossed the strait to Calabria to meet his mother, Eleanor, who arrived with his fiancée, Berengaria of Navarre.⁵⁰⁵ Eleanor, who had lived through much since her previous visit to Sicily

four decades earlier, had not seen her youngest daughter in fourteen years. In the event, she stayed into the first days of April before returning to England, stopping *en route* to visit the pope, leaving her daughter and future daughter-in-law at Messina to proceed to the Holy Land.

On Crusade

In early April, Richard sent Joanna and Berengaria ahead of him to Palestine with a small flotilla while he tended to some final preparations before setting sail with his main fleet a few days later.⁵⁰⁶ Among many other tasks, he destroyed most of Mategriffon, the castle he had built of timber and stone to keep an eye over the Messinians.⁵⁰⁷

Along the way to the Holy Land, the large galley transporting Joanna and Berengaria was blown off course by a violent storm. The ladies and their retinue found themselves off the coast of Cyprus.⁵⁰⁸ Richard landed at Rhodes, where he spent a few days recuperating from an illness while Philip was already at the Siege of Acre. Before long, Richard's fleet was sailing again.

Anchored in deep water near the port of Limassol, the galley carrying Joanna and Berengaria waited for several days in late April while some pilgrims from other ships went ashore. Unfortunately, these pilgrims were attacked, robbed and imprisoned.

About a week later, the ruler of Cyprus, Isaac Comnenus, a kinsman of the Byzantine Emperor of the same name, began to coax the ladies and their entourage into coming ashore. They were on the verge of accepting when Richard's fleet arrived and routed the Byzantine force, constraining Isaac to come to terms.⁵⁰⁹

On the twelfth of May, with Cyprus under his control, Richard wed Berengaria at Limassol, where she was crowned Queen of England.⁵¹⁰

NOTES

445. The name *Plantagenet*, originally *Plante Genest*, is derived from Geoffrey's liking for the broom plant, *planta genista*, of which he reputedly wore a sprig from his helmet as if it were a crest.

446. Eleanor was lodged at Palermo's royal palace, where Queen Sibylla gave birth to a son a month later. During the time she spent in the city, Eleanor may have met Margaret of Navarre, whose precise date of arrival in 1149 is not known. The chief account is found in the letter of Louis VII to his trusted counsellor, Suger of Saint-Denis, for which see *Recueil des Historiens des Gauls et de la France* (in Sources), volume 15, pages 513-514, where the French monarch writes that: *In Calabriae (sic) partibus secundum depositionem divinam primus reditui nostro desideratae securitatus portus occurrit, applicuimusque IV kalendas augusti. Ibi siquidem ab hominibus dilectissimi nostri Rogerii, Regis Siciliae, devote reverenterque suscepti, et ab ipso quidem directis ad nos frequenter tam literis quam nunciis magnificentius honorati, fere jam per tres hebdomadas Reginae hominumque nostrorum praestolabamur adventum; quae seorsum a nobis delata navigio, post multos tandem circuitus terrae et maris, per Dei gratiam Panormam Siciliae felici cursu pervenerat, atque inde ad nos cum omni incolumitate et gaudio properabat. sed et Lingonensis episcopi gravis quidem et incerta inter mortem et vitam infirmitas non minima causa dilationum exstiterat; et habendum cum praefato Rege colloquium redituus nostri accelerationem pariter retardabat. Eo itaque viso, caeterisque paratis quae nostro videbantur expedire itineri, viam nostram accelerare curabimus; quatinus et vos in nostris amplexibus, et nos in vestris, praestante Domino, pariter gaudeamus.* (Earlier correspondence to Suger and to King Roger of Sicily appears on pages 495-496, and in the same volume see page 425 for a description from *The Deeds of Pope Eugene III* of the two kings meeting at Potenza and then going to see the pope, also the *Annales Casinenses* entry for 1149 mentioning their visit to that abbey in October.) Writing much later, William of Nangis mentions the episode with an emphasis on Louis rather than Eleanor; see *Chronique Latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, volume 1, page 46. Louis himself wrote that he landed "in Calabria," but his trek to Potenza argues for Taranto, Bari or some other port in Apulia. The *Historia Pontificalis* of John of Salisbury also records the incident, though slightly differently, stating that the galleys of Eleanor and her husband were intercepted by Byzantines but rescued by the ships of Roger II, which took the couple to Palermo; see *John of Salisbury's Memoirs of the Papal Court*, pages 60-61 (but in her footnote on page 61 Marjorie Chibnall, the editor, postulates that the copyist may have simply written Palermo instead of Potenza).

447. Marie, Countess of Champagne, and Alix, Countess of Blois, both of whom lived until 1198.

448. Under an entry for 1153 Ralph of Diceto wrote: *Alienor duci Normanniae peperit Willelmum* (young William died in 1156). For 1155, by which time Eleanor was Queen of England, an entry reads: *Natus est Lundoniae pridie kalendas Martii feria secunda filius Henrico regi Anglorum ex regina Alienor, et vocatus est Henricus, quem Ricardus Lundoniensis episcopus baptizavit.* Roger of Wendover also mentions these births.

449. Among the myriad of biographies of Eleanor of Aquitaine, two that stand out for their thoroughness are those of Jean Flori and Ralph Turner.

450. See, in particular, Yates Thompson Manuscript 12, folio 188v (shown in this

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499. Ibid, pages 165-166.

500. Ibid, page 163.

501. For the details about Bagnara see *The Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II and Richard I*, volume 2, page 127; *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden*, volume 2, page 158 mentions this and also Philip's interest in the pretty widow (see also note 504).

502. One chronicle reports that later, at Acre, Richard borrowed Joanna's dower funds with the intention of repaying her; see *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr*, page 104. A fine analysis is Colette Bowie's paper "To Have and Have Not."

503. *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, pages 172-173.

504. Philip's wife, Isabella of Hainault, had died earlier in the year. William of Newburgh tells us of a marriage proposal made by Philip to Joanna in 1195; see *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, volume 2, page 459.

505. *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, pages 174-176.

506. Ibid, page 176-177.

507. Part of a tower of this castle is located in Viale Principe Umberto at the Sacrario di Cristo Re, a domed church overlooking the old city.

508. *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, page 182. An alternate account states that the ladies were shipwrecked.

509. Ibid, pages 183-194; *Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II and Richard I*, volume 2, pages 162-167.

510. *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, pages 195-196.

511. *Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II and Richard I*, volume 2, pages 168-169.

512. *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, page 182, where we read that: *Eodemque die introduxit ad se in palatium, uxorem suam reginam Angliae, et Siciliae reginam sororem suam.*

513. This incident is reported by the chronicler Baha ad-Din in *The Life of Saladin*, pages 253-254. For a more recent translation see *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, page 154.

514. This is reported by Baha ad-Din in *The Life of Saladin*, pages 310-312, 326. For a modern translation see *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin*, pages 187-188, 195-196. See also *Suite de la Troisieme Croisade*, pages 334-336.

515. Indeed, the marriage proposal may not even have been tendered. No European chronicler mentions it.