

ELEANOR OF PROVENCE: VIRAGO

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by  
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## ELEANOR OF PROVENCE: VIRAGO

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### ABSTRACT

Queen Eleanor of Provence, wife to King III and mother to King Edward I lived and reigned in the thirteenth century. Contemporary chroniclers maligned her as both a foreign presence in England and a controlling wife who was responsible for leading her weak husband astray. The most famous of these accounts is the *Chronica Majora* written by Matthew Paris. His accounts have been taken as the official history of Henry III and Eleanor of Provence by modern historians resulting in Eleanor being sidelined or labeled as a destabilizing factor in her husband's court. Due to Henry III's extensive record keeping which documented his reign and household, current historians are taking a second look at his kingship as well as the life of his queen, Eleanor of Provence. As these records have been examined and translated, they are opening up new insights into Henry's reign, including more accurate information as to the role and actions of Eleanor of Provence, offering historians a more balanced view of her life. This information has included: her financial management, her relationship with her natal family, the Savoyards and their influence on England through the king, and her role in the Sicilian business, King Henry's quests to obtain the Sicilian crown for his youngest son, Prince Edmund.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Eleanor of Provence: Virago,” presented by Elysia Ann Collins, candidate for Master of Arts in History degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Figure 1. Head of Eleanor of Provence.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Virago. The word means a loud, overbearing woman: Termagant. Alternatively, the original Latin definition suggests a woman of great stature, strength, and courage. This word was used to define Queen Eleanor of Provence, wife to King Henry III and mother to King Edward I, during her lifetime. The original Latin meaning suggests a positive connotation for this term. By the time it was given to Eleanor of Provence its meaning had shifted to the negative.<sup>1</sup>

In truth, virago is a term given to women who moved outside of the cultural norms of their time and challenged societal expectations for females. For Eleanor of Provence, this negative meaning has stuck with her. References to her in histories and chronicles have focused on the negative actions she undertook, for example the acquisition of funds from the Jewish population in order to meet her expenditure needs and cover her debts;<sup>2</sup> or they have sidelined her, leaving much of her life, career, and motivations unexplored.

Eleanor of Provence, in many ways, challenged the precepts of her time. Born around 1223 in the county of Provence, located in southern France, Eleanor came to England in 1236 to marry King Henry III. She came with a large familial retinue that included six uncles from her mother's home county of Savoy. These six uncles would impact her career as queen in

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<sup>1</sup>"Numen-The Latin Lexicon," The Latin Lexicon-An Online Latin Dictionary, accessed September 20, 2019, <http://latinlexicon.org/>; "Merriam Webster Online Dictionary," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed September 20, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

<sup>2</sup>H.P Stokes, "The Relationship Between the Jews and the Royal Family of England in the Thirteenth Century" *Transactions (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 8 (1915-1917): 153-70 at 156.

significant ways as she grew into the role, and her husband accepted them and placed them in important positions in his court through appointment and marriage. Their prominence in Henry's court would have a less than favorable impact on Eleanor's reputation through history.<sup>3</sup>

During her long and successful marriage to Henry, Eleanor managed most of her own estates and would continue to do so during her widowhood. She acted as regent for England when Henry III left her in charge during his Gascony campaign in 1254. She successfully aided her natal family in gaining positions within the royal court and they became primary sources of advice and counsel to King Henry III. This last issue was one that would incur significant amounts of criticism, and reflect poorly on the queen in her adopted country.

Matthew Paris, the main chronicler of Henry III and Eleanor of Provence, held Henry III in contempt for listening to his wife's relatives, and for appointing foreigners, whom he disdained, to high office over his own "English barons." It is important to note that the baronage of the time was not "English" in our modern understanding. Most of the barons were of French origin, and spoke the language. His anti-alien view, a tendency shared by the vast majority of the English, coupled with his own perceptions and biases on both the papacy and women, undoubtedly influenced other Chroniclers, particularly those who shared their points of view. This resulted in the king being represented as weak and gullible with the queen as his master manipulator. One such example of this sentiment can be found in the *Chronicles of Melrose* when the monk chronicling events in 1263 wrote "Eleanor of

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<sup>3</sup>Margaret Howell. *Eleanor of Provence: Queenship in Thirteenth Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

Provence, queen of England was believed to be the root, the fomenter and disseminator of all the discord which was sown between her husband, King Henry and the barons of his kingdom.”<sup>4</sup>

Eleanor was an ambitious, intelligent, and crafty woman who pushed the boundaries on what it meant to be a queen, and who understood how to utilize the personal influence she wielded in her marriage to her benefit as well as to the benefit of the people she loved. She was fiercely loyal to her family and her personal relationships mattered to her. She was a loving wife, a devoted and sometimes possessive mother, and a loyal friend to the people around her. This loyalty can be seen in how the queen remembered the actions of her lady in waiting, Margaret Biseth, who saved the lives of Eleanor and Henry in 1238. A man had snuck into the king’s bedrooms with a knife and rushed the king’s bed in order to assassinate the royal couple.<sup>5</sup> Henry III had been spending his night with his wife in her rooms and as the assassin began to search the adjoining areas for the duo, he startled one of the queen’s ladies, Margaret Biseth, who alerted the attendants of the danger. The assassin was captured, and Henry and Eleanor were safe. Some thirty years past this event, the queen insisted that Henry III grant property to the Biseth Foundation for Lepers, an organization that was near and dear to Margaret Biseth during her life.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Joseph Stevenson, tran. *Chronica De Mailros E Codice Unico In Bibliotheca Servato, Nunc Iterum in Lucem Edita: Notulis Indiceque Aucta* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Printing Company, 1835) 191.; The Church Historians of England, trans. Joseph Stevenson, Volume 4, Part 1. (London: Oxford University Press, 1856) 215

<sup>5</sup>“Close Rolls, September 1238,” in *Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry III: Volume 4, 1237-1242*, ed. H.C. Maxwell Lyte (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1911), 146. *British History Online*, accessed October 21, 2020, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-close-rolls/hen3/vol4/p146>.; Matthew Paris, *Matthew Paris's English History*, trans. John Allen Giles, vol. 1 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852) 138.

<sup>6</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 22-23: When an escheator questioned this grant, Eleanor pointedly warned him that the grant was issued due to the royal family’s long-standing love for the house.

Yet Eleanor could also be a harsh landlord who pushed the boundaries on what was considered appropriate for a queen's behavior when it came to acquiring lands by taking advantage of other debts owed to the Jews. As queen she enjoyed a special status within the legal system, and by this status she was set apart from all other subjects of the crown. She could not be sued by writ in the courts of law, but she could sue with or without her husband. This gave her a significant advantage over any potential adversary that she might bump heads with in a legal dispute, and it is safe to assume that she probably made some enemies. As Eleanor gained more property, both in wardship and then in fee, she became involved in several cases. While she did not always get the favorable outcome, she was given a significant advantage over everyone else, and this may yet be another reason she was thought of in a negative light.<sup>7</sup> At the very least it opened a door for her detractors to go through and use to their benefit.

Her political activity during the thirteenth century made an impact on English history, yet within a hundred years of her death, she was virtually forgotten, with the only significant memory of her found in the writings of Matthew Paris, whose Chronicle accounts of the reign of Henry and Eleanor are considered primary sources for their lives. It is Matthew's words that have become the bedrock of what we think we know about Eleanor of Provence. While Matthew was not always wrong in his assessment of their actions, he often failed to be an unbiased reporter of events.

Modern historians have seemingly taken Paris's Chronicles at face value, and Eleanor's history which is limited, does little to shed light on her actions, motivations, or her character. T. F. Tout's publication *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval*

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<sup>7</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 263-265.

*England: The Wardrobe, the Chamber and the Small Seals* declared Eleanor of Provence an “unthrifty housewife” in the section that examines the creation of her queen’s wardrobe and the deficits that are found in the accounting books.<sup>8</sup>

Eleanor is referenced in a limited capacity in Sir Maurice Powicke’s *The Thirteenth Century 1216-1307*. His description of her as a “vigorous, incisive, downright woman” is a more positive characterization as opposed to prior writings published during the Victorian era.<sup>9</sup> Powick states the following: “that she wielded great influence over her husband” and that “she made herself felt because she was an active woman whose importance was recognized in her time.” He acknowledges that she was best known for her uniting the court of Henry III and her Savoyard family, something which did have great impact on the king, England, and both her reputation as queen and the memory of her queenship even centuries later. He completely misses the mark when he suggests that she was not “particularly ambitious or self-assertive.”<sup>10</sup>

Historian Michael Prestwich mentions her in passing in his book *Edward I*. The sum total of her time in the book would amount to a paragraph of information. She appears infrequently as devoted mother to Edward, though he does provide some limited insight by way of two small statements he makes about her relationship with her son. The first is that Eleanor possessed romances written in French, and that Edward may have gained a taste for

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas F. Tout. *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England: the Wardrobe, the Chamber and the Small Seals*, vol. 1 (Manchester: University Press, 1937), accessed November 18, 2019, <https://doi.org/https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015011516641&view=1up&seq=1&q1=queens%20wardrobe,253-255>. Tout notes that this was the first time in history that a queen’s wardrobe had been created, and that it was a smaller replica of the King’s wardrobe.

<sup>9</sup>See Agnes Strickland’s *Lives of the Queens of England* published in 1852 in which Eleanor of Provence is characterized as a vain, extravagant, opinionated young woman who gained control of her weak-willed husband, Henry III.

<sup>10</sup>Maurice Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century 1216-1307, 2nd ed.* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962.).

such works from her. This indicates that she may have been both educated and literate. At the very least it would seem that the chivalric romances had captured her fancy. The second statement he makes is in reference to the possibility of Gascony going to Edward instead of Richard of Cornwall, the king's brother, who had been named Count of Poitou because of his marriage to Eleanor's younger sister, Sanchia, a union that the queen either pushed for or at the very least supported. The push for Edward to receive Gascony was an action that apparently angered Richard of Cornwall, as can be seen in personal correspondence sent to Queen Eleanor from theologian, Adam Marsh.<sup>11</sup> Prestwich states that even at this early stage in Edward's life, she seemed to be more concerned about Edward's future than even Henry III. He does not, however, analyze her crown-saving actions during the Second Baron's War. The kindest thing he had to say about her was that she was a woman of "indomitable figure, and her son had inherited her strength of character."<sup>12</sup>

The last, most complete and fair monograph that was produced solely on Queen Eleanor's life was *Eleanor of Provence: Queenship in Thirteenth Century-England* published in 1998 by Margaret Howell. Howell takes the time to analyze the existing primary sources, compare those documents to Chronicle accounts, and offer a counterbalance to the negative accounts that had come before her. Howell herself notes, however, that she had found so much evidence in the English archives that she had been unable to examine the continental archives, and there was plenty of room for more scholarship.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Letter to Eleanor of Provence from Adam Marsh, 1242-3, accessed September 7, 2020, [epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/663](http://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/663).

<sup>12</sup>Michael Prestwich. *Edward I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 5-6, 123: Prestwich also references a letter written by Edward I to Charles Salerno in which he states that since the death of his father, he was more closely bound to Eleanor than to any other person.

<sup>13</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, xix.

It should shock us that a queen who played a significant political role during her husband's reign and who had a hand in shaping England during the thirteenth century, is the subject of just one in depth study. Queen Eleanor continues to be passed over as a side note in her husband's reign and the negative characterization of her as a virago lingers. One main reason for this is that much of what is known about her comes from scholarship written by males, many of whom attest that women were silent in the Middle Ages. Yet there is significant evidence to suggest that this simply was not true.

As stated above, her main chronicler was Matthew Paris. He was a cloistered monk at St. Albans Monastery. This limited his exposure to women, court politics, and made him dependent on the gossip and stories that came with visitors to the monastery. This is especially true in regards to issues surrounding queens and their financial circumstances. Since many of these visitors were often nobles who might have had an axe to grind with King Henry III and his Queen, this might make their accounts problematic.<sup>14</sup>

There are a number of problems that come up when using medieval chronicle accounts such as the *Chronica Majora* as our sole understanding of the kings and queens of England. This is especially true for the queens. Aside from unhappy nobles, debtors, and other travelers sharing their stories with Matthew Paris at the monastery, there is also the fact that as cloistered monks, all of the chroniclers had little to no interaction with women, and as religious men they would have had strict viewpoints of what a woman's role was in medieval society.

These viewpoints came from past philosophers and scholars who classified women as the lesser sex. A good woman was a silent one. Their main duties were to birth children,

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<sup>14</sup>Joseph Dahmus, "Matthew Paris," in *Seven Medieval Historians* (Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall, 1982), 165-205.

maintain the household, and act in ways that benefitted their husbands. These limited classifications of a woman have their origins in the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, and for Christians, the Hebrew Kingdoms, before becoming embedded in Roman Civil Law, which then became the bedrock of the Canon Law that would influence ecclesiastical thought in medieval England.

These laws defined a woman's role in medieval society, especially queens. A queen was not supposed to be greedy, or seen as seeking to accumulate wealth. She should ensure that her husband ruled with equity and clemency, using all the charms of her sex. The medieval coronation ceremony used the Biblical Esther as the model for the English queen to live by. A charitable and virtuous queen, according to these precepts, would lead to a just and merciful king.<sup>15</sup>

My goal in writing this thesis is to shed light on Eleanor of Provence's life and actions and to re-establish her voice in order to show that she was not silent, nor was she an evil shrew leading her simpleton husband astray. As there is no significant scholarship available on her, my hope is that this thesis might both encourage fellow historians as well as present a starting point for a re-evaluation of her life that cuts through the biased reporting and gives her the place in English history she deserves. I will accomplish this goal by focusing mostly on the first twenty years of her career as queen and three main areas of her life: a) Eleanor's finances b) her early years as queen and the influx of the Savoyards into England; and c) the Sicilian Business, Henry III's attempt to claim the Sicilian throne for his

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<sup>15</sup>John Carmi Parsons, "Eleanor of Castile (1241-1290): Legend and Reality through Seven Centuries," in *Eleanor of Castile 1290-1990: Essays to Commemorate the 700th Anniversary of Her Death*: 28 November 1290 (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1991), 23-54.



youngest son, Edmund, an action that Eleanor both encouraged and supported. It is an event which has been used as an example to justify the historical claim that he was a fool.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, I will offer evidence of the biased reporting on her life by analyzing the primary source as written by Matthew Paris, and offering counterarguments against them, because knowing who told their story gives additional context to properly analyze and understand it. The main biases that will be identified are the following: (1) she was a foreigner and there was a strong anti-alien sentiment in England at this time; (2) she was a royal woman exercising influence and power with her husband and accumulating wealth for her own purposes; 3) she was used as a scapegoat by Matthew Paris and others to express their displeasure with Henry III's policies and kingship. This can be tied directly to the ill-formed belief that Henry III was a weak and ineffectual king.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Björn Weiler, "Henry III and the Sicilian Business: a Reinterpretation" *Historical Research* 74, no. 184 (2001) 127-150 at 127.

<sup>17</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 1:419-20: Henry III was not a great warrior king in the tradition of his forebears or in the chivalric ideal promoted by troubadours and in the literature of the time. His military defeat in Gascony, described in detail by Matthew Paris in a passage called the *Flight of the king of England* damaged his military reputation which could in fact have influenced how others viewed his career as king overall.

## CHAPTER 2 ELEANOR AND HER FINANCES

There are a several aspects of Henry and Eleanor's life that were open for judgment both during their lifetime and in the centuries since they lived. One area of trouble that has been repeatedly brought up is their capabilities or lack thereof of successfully maintaining their finances. Repeatedly Matthew Paris remarks with great vitriol on the extravagant lifestyle of Henry III and Queen Eleanor, particularly as it applied to the renovation and reconstruction of their various properties, something Paris deemed frivolous. Matthew also makes note of Henry's lavish gifting and mismanagement of money throughout the entirety of his chronicles, specifically offering the perception that the king's excessive gift giving to Eleanor's foreign family showed the depth of their contempt for the native English.

In truth, these writings are nothing more than Paris's perceptions. He did not have access to the actual accounts of expenditures that were recorded and preserved in the royal chancery. Matthew's depictions of extravagance and the greed of the royal family were impressionistic and based on hearsay. Henry's actual expenditures were recorded in a series of documents called the Liberate Rolls. In these rolls it is possible to reconstruct the expenditures on royal properties, including the extensive and transformative renovations he undertook at Westminster Abbey.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Liberate Rolls show Henry issuing a contrabreve to the Sheriff of Berkshire on May 26, 1257 to receive all of the timber that was purchased by his carpenter specifically for the king's work at Westminster. Another entry made just two days later on May 28 indicate a more personal, familial expenditure when a

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<sup>1</sup>David Carpenter, *Henry III: The Rise to Power and Personal Rule, 1207-1258* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 165-245.

contrabreve was issued for the building of a tomb over the body of Henry and Eleanor's young daughter, Katherine.<sup>2</sup>

Westminster was not the only property Henry renovated or repaired. On May 16, 1252 the Liberate Rolls indicate a contrabreve issued to the Sheriff of Hampshire for repairs on the barriers around the bailey of Winchester Castle. The rolls indicate that they were broken down. The same entry also indicates repairs to the battlements of the walls around the offices as they had fallen into the lawn, and the wainscoting of the queen's wardrobe where needed.<sup>3</sup> A later entry made in June of 1252 indicates additional contrabreves for a roof over the penthouse between the great gate of Winchester Castle and the king's almonry with slate. Further improvements to the king's chapel were also indicated. The bailiffs of Winchester were issued a contrabreve to levy 50l to the Sheriff of Hampshire for the king's works at Winchester and Freymantle.<sup>4</sup> The Liberate Roll records indicate that the Henry and Eleanor's expenditures were more about repairing their many homes and making them livable for their family, and less about living a grand lifestyle. Another example of this is seen in an entry dated October 20, 1255 when a contrabreve was issued to Stephen Fromund, keeper of the king's castle of Merleberg so that repairs could be carried out where needed on the ovens, gutters, and the pond and bays of the stew.<sup>5</sup>

The Liberate Rolls also show Henry III repeatedly issuing money to Queen Eleanor to assist her in meeting her household expenditures, such as in February 1254 when the

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<sup>2</sup>*Calendar of the Liberate Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1959) 376.

<sup>3</sup>CLR, vol. IV, 47.

<sup>4</sup>CLR, vol. IV, 57.

<sup>5</sup>CLR, vol. IV, 243.

queen liberated £1144 to Walter de Bradelegh, keeper of her wardrobe, to pay her expenses.<sup>6</sup> These entries are found monthly in the liberate rolls, and it can be assumed that the expenses being taken care of were for her household.

The explanation for Henry's funding Eleanor of Provence's household as well as the accusation that he spent excessive money on her can be traced to the customary payment of queen's gold. Queen's gold was an additional levy of ten percent paid to queens on fines made with the king. This was an automatic surcharge, and one to which a queen was legally due. Eleanor began receiving them immediately upon her marriage.<sup>7</sup> There is evidence in the Liberate Rolls and the Fine Rolls to suggest that this was a major contributor to her finances. The Rolls show the records of fines being paid to the king, and while they don't record the additional assessment of gold that went to the queen, since it was an automatic tax on fines that were ten marks or higher, we can assume that this was a significant amount of her income. It was paid to the Exchequer, and the rolls also indicate when the king shifted that money to the queen. This explains the monthly release of money for her expenditures. Prior to 1237, Henry III was directing specifically where the money was being spent, and it typically was spent for the renovations to her household, or rolled over to her as part of her income so she could utilize them as she saw fit within her household. Changes can begin to be seen after 1237 as the king's control over the gold began to shift to the queen. After a few instances in the 1240s, the queen takes total control over the administration over her finances.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>CLR, vol. IV, 157.

<sup>7</sup>Margaret Howell, "The Resources of Eleanor of Provence as Queen Consort," *The English Historical Review* 102, no. 403 (April 1987) 372-393 at 373. There are no surviving records of her gold.

<sup>8</sup>CLR, vol. IV, 310.; Howell, *Resources of Eleanor of Provence*, 377.

Queen's gold was unpopular, seen as an additional value-added tax, and many debtors resisted paying it. The queen's own officials often matched this resistance with great fervor in collecting the money. Upon receipt of the gold, the queen issued her own letters patent, which acknowledged receipt of the gold. It was only then that a debtor could make the claim to be quit of his fine at the Exchequer. In 1255, during a time of great upheaval for Henry III's court, there was some struggle over the collection of the gold on the City of London, with debtors who were resisting making the payments. The sheriffs of the city, showing some sympathy towards the citizens by not collecting the fines, were imprisoned and the city was taken into the king's hand, though it was restored to the mayors and bailiffs at the insistence of the queen on condition that the gold was paid by a certain date.<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, the collection of the additional queen's gold reflected poorly on the queen, even if it was a system that was established prior to her reign.

Henry III had undertaken renovations of his properties in his kingdom, and money was also needed to fund campaigns such as the 1254 Gascony campaign. While Henry III could, in the words of Matthew Paris, "extort" money from people such as the Jews, oftentimes it fell to Eleanor, particularly during her term as regent while he was in Gascony, to find sources of money. Her diplomatic skills would be needed again during the Second Baron's War fought against Simon de Montfort and other rebelling nobles. Saving Henry and Edward cost money, and Eleanor went abroad to France in an attempt to find it.<sup>10</sup>

What was especially unique about Eleanor's finances was that Henry III created a separate department within his own wardrobe, the Queen's Wardrobe, shortly after their

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<sup>9</sup>Howell, *Resources of Eleanor of Provence*, 377-378.

<sup>10</sup>Tout, *Chapters*, 253-255

marriage. This was an office that employed its own clerks and officials. The wardrobe had its own administrative records and accounts, and over time would eventually be independent of the king's wardrobe after which it was modeled. Initially, the king appointed the clerk that oversaw the office, but eventually, from 1254 on, Eleanor appointed her own clerks, essentially taking control over her own, extensive resources, and it is a matter of record that under her maintenance, they were stabilized and manageable for much of her career as queen. This would indicate that she was far thriftier than Tout might have imagined.<sup>11</sup>

Utilizing her household records gives us a better understanding at how she was managing her household funds. T. F. Tout, who looked at the deficits in her accounting books with little context, claiming she was unthriftly, has it wrong. If we focus on the last Baron's war between the years of 1263 to 1265 with Eleanor abroad to the continent spearheading a vigorous war effort to assist Henry and Edward in securing the crown we can see where the deficit trouble began. Initially, her wardrobe accounts maintained steadily through her career as Queen. The £26,000 deficit that Tout looks at in 1272 show the aftermath of the financial commitments she made to France, as well as her years living and maintaining a sizeable household in France and it turned out to be costly.<sup>12</sup>

This is but one example where additional administrative documents have helped to shed light on one aspect of Eleanor's life, career, and money management, offering a better context from which historians could interpret. This indicates that there is ample evidence to re-evaluate the history, action, and reputation of Eleanor of Provence, particularly in light of new approaches to scholarship and a developing interest in women's history. Her story is far

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid, 253-255.; Howell, *The Resources of Eleanor of Provence*, 372, 377 & 391.

<sup>12</sup>Howell, *Resources of Eleanor of Provence*, 391-392.

richer and her personality more well-rounded and complex when researchers can identify the biases that influenced the writers, utilize new and developing methodologies, and make use of the numerous archival resources that are available from King Henry III's reign.

Matthew Paris is less than an ideal reporter of Henry's financial decisions, something that is tied to Eleanor and her own money management. He wrote down many of his impressions without any context in which to base his biased opinions. Repeatedly Paris reports on Henry's avarice throughout his chronicles. One such example is in an entry dated to December of 1237 when Paris reports that the king gathered his nobles at the royal palace of Westminster. It was at this meeting that the king accused them of bad advice and as a result he was now destitute. He demanded assistance from the nobles, and told them the money they raised would henceforth be used for the necessary uses of the kingdom. Paris goes on to record that the nobles rebelled against this

They replied with indignation that they were oppressed... and that it would be unworthy of them, and injurious of them, to allow a king so easily led away, who had never repelled or even frightened one of the enemies of the kingdom, even the least of them, and who had never increased his territories but rather lessened them, and placed them under foreign yoke, to extort so much money, so often, and by so many arguments from his natural subjects, as if they were slaves of the lowest condition, to their injury and for the benefit of foreigners.<sup>13</sup>

In his book, *Seven Medieval Historians*, published in 1982, medieval historian Joseph Dahmus remarks that current historians are not in complete agreement concerning Matthew Paris's recording of Henry's demands. He goes on to say that until recent years historians tended to believe Paris's statements on Henry's expenditures, but more recent studies were beginning to call the Chronicle accounts into question. Dahmus states the following: "...the

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<sup>13</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 1:43

error, if error it was, of judging Henry too severely, was not that of Matthew so much as his modern readers.”<sup>14</sup> Dahmus suggests that Medieval Chroniclers often presented the events of their time as it struck them, though they did not have the advantage of being on the scene of the event as it played out. He believes it is unrealistic to think that Matthew Paris would have been an impersonal observer, capable of looking at events broadly. Paris did not appreciate the rising cost of government but instead focused in on Henry’s extravagance, particularly towards his wife’s family and friends whom he presented with gold and offices. This left Henry open to critics such as Paris who was able to convince himself, perhaps with the help of other disgruntled nobles, that all of Henry’s financial issues were of his own making. Matthew was also happy to allow Henry to share the blame with his foreign wife and Savoyard in-laws or “evil advisors.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Dahmus, *Seven Medieval Historians*, 185.

<sup>15</sup>Dahmus, *Seven Medieval Historians*, 184-186.



## CHAPTER 3

### ELEANOR AND THE SAVOYARDS

A starting point for the exploration of her identity as both a European and as an English queen is the idea of her foreignness, particularly in light of the anti-alien sentiment that existed in England. Her familial connections both empowered her role in the court, but they also worked against her in how she was received as a queen by the English, and how those feelings then transferred into her reputation and historical memory.

Eleanor arrived in England accompanied by her uncle, the bishop-elect of Valence William of Savoy. She wed Henry III on January 14, 1236 in Canterbury at the age of twelve. Henry was twenty-nine. She was crowned queen a few days later at a lavish affair described in detail by Matthew Paris.<sup>1</sup> Just a few months later, on April 28, 1236, Matthew Paris writes of irritation among the king's nobles. Paris states that the English nobles met in London to discuss "the affairs of the kingdom." He goes on to state:

it was a cause of astonishment to many that the king followed the advice of the bishop elect of Valencia more than he ought, despising, as it appeared to them, his own natural subjects and at this they were annoyed, and accused the king of fickleness, saying amongst themselves, 'Why does not this bishop elect betake himself to the kingdom of France, as the French king has married the elder sister of our queen, to manage the affairs of the French kingdom, like he does here, by reason of his niece the queen of that country?'<sup>2</sup>

Eleanor's Savoyard family, specifically her uncles, had a profound influence on her life and career as queen. This impact is interwoven with the negativity that surrounds her historical memory. Part of the issue was Henry's instant affection for his new in-laws, who

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 1:8-9

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 1:8-9.

had begun flocking to England upon her marriage to the king, and the “excessive” rewards that he offered them, sometimes sight unseen. This benefitted Eleanor in a number of ways, particularly by establishing her as “under the protection” of her mother’s family, yet the relationship also set her up as the face of the Savoyard link. William’s unpopularity as a foreigner, coupled with the perceived favoritism shown him by the king over native-born Englishmen tended to rebound back on her. As queen, Eleanor would have been managing these various relationships, and she would have needed insight, instinct, and intelligence to keep them in balance.

William of Savoy was the first of the very able and politically savvy of the Savoy brothers to make a mark in England. He had negotiated Eleanor’s marriage to Henry and certainly would have looked to protect her interests, but her marriage also opened the door for opportunity in England for all of the Savoyards. He would be followed by his brothers, Thomas, Peter, and Boniface over the course of Henry’s long reign, along with countless other cousins and extended family whom Henry welcomed with open arms and generous gifts and honors. Eleanor not only welcomed her natal family warmly, she made a point to place them in strategic positions within the court, as well as garnering marriages between them and the English nobility. This was an act that ensured their integration into English society, and placed subjects loyal to the crown around her immediate family. And her uncles were more than mere “yes” men. The Savoyards did not “need” England, and they were capable of standing up to Henry III when they thought he was in the wrong. They had built strategic positions across Europe, and with the Papacy. William and his kin felt an obligation to Henry III. The Savoyards both shared and encouraged his continental ambitions, aiding him in carrying out the policies that resulted from these aspirations. As England opposed

Henry's policies, his typical answer was to double down in his relationship with his in-laws, pulling them in closer, effectively building a barrier between himself and the anger and unrest at home. On more than one occasion, the Savoyards played peacemaker between Henry and his barons and stood by him, especially when his authority was threatened. They were capable and served his interests even while serving their own ambitions in mutually beneficial arrangements. In return, Henry III rewarded them with land, money, and knighthoods.<sup>3</sup>

This excessive generosity towards Eleanor's family led to a growing hostility among his barons towards the favorite Savoyards, as they watched the foreign newcomers gain almost instant royal affection and reward, while men they deemed worthier were passed over. For example, Henry made William of Savoy his chief counselor and he was said to have had influence on financial and administrative policies being issued by the brand-new royal counsel which was headed by the Englishman, William Raleigh. While the reforms were often fiscally and structurally sound, they were also often unpopular with the general populace, and the blame very likely shifted to the foreigner William of Savoy who had garnered many perks, most notably the earldom of Richmond, from his close status with Henry III.<sup>4</sup>

Matthew Paris's recordings of King Henry's interactions with his in-laws provide us with clues as to both his biases and motivations and how this reflected on Eleanor. For example, in March of 1237, Paris writes that "William, bishop elect of Valencia, to whom the king had entirely entrusted the reins of government, seeing that the nobles had, not without

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<sup>3</sup>Eugene Cox, *The Eagles of Savoy: the House of Savoy in the Thirteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 108.

<sup>4</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 25.

reason, conceived great indignation against him, on that account took his departure for his own country.” In the same entry he goes on to say:

And so cunningly had this man managed matters, that the king, abandoning the example set him by the noble emperor and the careful king of France, who did not permit their backs to be trodden upon by their wives and their relatives and countrymen, deprived and drained of all his money, and become a needy man, suffered this bishop to pull his kingdom to pieces, and being under the influence of his wife, allowed him, on the least pretense, to consume the produce of his own territories.<sup>5</sup>

Paris goes on to state that the king allowed both his in-laws and foreigners of all nationalities to “fatten themselves on the good things of the country, to the injury of his kingdom.”<sup>6</sup>

The year 1239 brought about the sudden death of William of Savoy, however, the next Savoy entered the picture quickly. Thomas of Savoy, Count of Flanders, sought to take advantage of the solid ties that existed between Flanders and England. Eleanor’s position as queen provided him with the door he needed. In 1240, he returned in need of money<sup>7</sup> and during the visit, stopped to see Eleanor and Prince Edward at Windsor, a place she stayed at for lengthy periods of time during her children’s youth. The visit may very well have served several purposes. Eleanor was always welcoming to her mother’s family and at the age of

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<sup>5</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 1:49

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 1:49.

<sup>7</sup>CLR, vol. 1, 472. Sponsoring William of Savoy’s candidature to the see of Liège incurred debts for Thomas. During the 1240 visit, he pressed Henry III for payment of a debt that Simon de Montfort owed him. Henry paid five hundred marks of the debt, but then put an immediate distraint for the rest on Simon’s lands, record of which can be found in the *Liberate Rolls*, something that Simon would greatly resent. Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 29.

seventeen, she was both old enough to grasp court politics, and as a new mother, was motivated to become involved to protect the interests of Prince Edward.<sup>8</sup>

The 1240s had also brought the arrival of two more Savoyard uncles to the English shores, and with them also came an expansion of Eleanor's power and influence in the court. The two new arrivals were Peter of Savoy, who arrived in December of 1240, and shortly thereafter Boniface of Savoy, who was elected to the Archbishop of Canterbury by Henry III in February of 1241, although he was not confirmed until November of 1243.<sup>9</sup> While we can only guess at the part that Eleanor played in bringing Peter and Boniface to England, it is safe to say that she used some of her influence with the king to bring about their hearty welcome.

Peter of Savoy would be the Savoyard uncle who had the most direct influence upon Eleanor, and to whom she would look to both for guidance and as a political partner. Henry III welcomed him with open arms, and he took his place as one of the king's closest counselors. Henry gave him lands, honors, and other benefits reflecting his deep appreciation for his Savoyard family. Paris described Peter as discreet and circumspect, mostly because he knew that the king's abundant generosity could cause trouble for him. One such issue could arise in the form of Richard of Cornwall, the king's brother, who had been away at the time of Peter's arrival. Peter and Richard finally met in Dover, and there was no apparent animosity between the men. This could be in part due to the arranged marriage that was in the works between Peter's niece and Queen Eleanor's sister, Sanchia.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 29. The relationship between Thomas and Eleanor was a solid one. She held him in high regard, and was confident in his judgment. Flanders would also provide Eleanor with men and money during the Second Baron's War.

<sup>9</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 1:458.; "The Henry III Fine Rolls Project," Fine Rolls Henry III: 28 HENRY III (28 October 1243–27 October 1244), accessed on October 30, 2020, [https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/roll\\_041.html](https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/roll_041.html).

<sup>10</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 31-32. This was a marital arrangement that Eleanor was heavily involved in.

Eleanor was a fast learner. She already understood the importance of her role as mother to Prince Edward, and likely realized that her power was based on her role as mother. As such, Eleanor sought complete control of all matters that directly affected the heir. Peter began introducing Savoyard protégés to Eleanor. This is important because Eleanor knew that her ability to act would be significantly increased with Peter's backing. The policy also included appointing Savoyards in roles of responsibility around Edward. Several had already been appointed, prior to Peter's arrival, indicating that Eleanor already understood the value of placing loyal people in the right positions. She and Henry had both been committed to integrating English and Savoyards together into their service. These appointments increased with Peter's arrival, with the primary focus being on Edward's affairs. By 1249, Peter of Savoy himself had become keeper of lands that had been set aside for Edward.<sup>11</sup>

Henry III had no issues with the Savoyard appointments. To the contrary, Henry III took a bold step by making Eleanor the natural guardian of Edward's interests. This was a move that had significant political ramifications as can be seen in writs found in the Calendar of the Patent Rolls. One such writ, issued in February 1241, directed John Lestrangle to deliver several castles upon the king's death to Eleanor to the use of Edward or any other heir produced from their marriage.<sup>12</sup> In appointing her as guardian to Edward I, Henry III showed trust in her capabilities over any other potential candidate for the role. This placed Eleanor, as guardian of her son's interests, in a main public figure role thus ensuring that the

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<sup>11</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 31-32.; "The Henry III Fine Rolls Project," Fine Rolls Henry III: 33 HENRY III (28 October 1248–27 October 1249), October 30, 2020, [https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/roll\\_046.html](https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/roll_046.html).

<sup>12</sup>*Calendar of the Patent Roles Preserved in the Public Record Office*, vol 3, 244.

Savoyards were front and center in court politics through their offices and appointments within Henry's court.<sup>13</sup>

Eleanor's relationship with her natal family was symbiotic in nature as it furthered the ambitions of her Savoyard uncles, while providing her a strong link that would help her maintain her own position after marriage, and that increased her prominence and added to her political strength in the short term, but in the long term threatened to cloud her role as the queen. Of the 170 Savoyards that entered England, half of whom became residents of England, two-thirds were clerks, mostly operating in the household of either Boniface of Savoy, the Archbishop of Canterbury, or of Peter of Aigueblanche, a nobleman from Savoy who had come to England with Eleanor at the time of her marriage. A few had functional roles inside the Queen's household or the households of her children.<sup>14</sup>

All of them came to the circle of royal patronage through a variety of paths, but ultimately many of them would move within her specific orbit. Many of the higher-ranking Savoyards were tied in some way to Peter of Savoy. As their benefactor, they were bound to him, and to each other. This also bound them to Queen Eleanor, for without her, none of their fortune would be possible.<sup>15</sup>

Eleanor had no dynastic interests in Savoy. Her interests in the relatives that came to England and whom she employed were different from Peter's. She welcomed them as queen and recognized many as her kin. She developed her own personal relationships with them,

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<sup>13</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 33.

<sup>14</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 49.; H.W. Ridgeway, "Foreign Favorites and Henry III's Problems of Patronage, 1247-1258," *The English Historical Review* 104, no. 412 (July 1989): 590-610 at 591.

<sup>15</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 49-51.

and she founded relationships that were often built on the bonds of friendship and loyalty. The relationships that Eleanor built with the Savoyard transplants and their families fostered loyalty, particularly when there was an uprising against the crown.<sup>16</sup>

One such example of this can be found in the case of the Joinville family. William de Salines and Simon de Joinville were the half-brothers of Peter of Savoy's wife, Agnes de Faucigny. William became a clerk of the queen, and a member of Prince Edward's household. Simon de Joinville came to England in 1252 to be knighted by the king and received a belt from Eleanor. Simon would fight for the king in Gascony and in 1259, the queen pressured the then justiciar, Hugh Bigod, to pay Simon's annual exchequer fee of fifty marks. The context of the entry, found in the Calendar of Liberate Rolls suggests that Eleanor and Simon were political accomplices, and the Joinvilles, or as they were known in Ireland and England, the Genevilles, became closely allied with the king and queen.<sup>17</sup>

Employing her Savoyard kin in her household was a way for Eleanor to bolster loyal support around herself in her husband's court, and it was a way for her to be impactful in ensuring her natal family was well cared for. Male heirs to powerful English earldoms and other high-ranking fiefs were targeted for marriage to Savoyard girls who were brought to England. Marriage arrangements were a natural area for women to exercise their power, and by all accounts Eleanor of Provence made excellent use of this agency with the king's full support. An entry entered in the *Close Rolls* on November 5, 1256 shows this support as it references the king granting his "dear queen" royal custody over all the lands, rents, and

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<sup>16</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 51-52.

<sup>17</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 51.; CLR, vol. IV, 487.



tenements that had been held by Walter Leydet until the heir comes of age, along with the marriage of the heir.<sup>18</sup> An entry in the Patent Rolls offers proof that the king had no issue with her exercising this power. Two such examples are seen in the marital arrangements made in 1247 between the king's ward, Edmund de Lacy, son of the late John de Lacy of Yorkshire, and Alice, the older daughter of Manfred, viscount of Saluzzo, a cousin to Eleanor of Provence. A primary vassal, John de Vescy was married to Alice's younger sister, Agnes.<sup>19</sup> The terms for the arrangement of John's marriage are found in the *Patent Rolls*, in an entry dated July 26, 1253. It references a grant to Peter de Sabaudia, upon the agreement made with the king's assent and in the king's presence, between him and William de Vescy, that de Vescy's eldest son and heir should marry one of the daughters of the lord of Chambre or of the vicomte of Aosta as the queen and the said Peter shall provide. In this case it is talking about the aforementioned John de Vescy. The entry goes on to say that if the heir, in this case John de Vescy, should die before the consummation of the marriage, then the marital arrangement agreement would apply to the next heir.<sup>20</sup>

Once these marriages were accomplished, Eleanor maintained her relationships with the Savoyard brides. These were lifelong friendships and Eleanor showed an interest in their lives, marriages, and children. She ensured that their interests were furthered in the royal court.<sup>21</sup> This shows not only the depth of feeling that Eleanor held for her family, but also that she understood the importance of solidifying the relationships around her. Ultimately

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<sup>18</sup>CR, vol. X, 4.

<sup>19</sup>Linda E. Mitchell, *Portraits of Medieval Women: Family, Marriage, and Politics in England 1225-1350* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 32.; CPR, vol. IV, 281.

<sup>20</sup>CPR, vol. IV, 281.

<sup>21</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 53

many of these relationships would prove beneficial in the years to come, though her actions did not come without a cost.

In 1257, Matthew Paris recorded another marriage arranged by Eleanor. The union was between Thomas of Savoy's daughter, Margaret, and Baldwin, the heir to the earldom of Devon. This was a marriage that Paris frowned upon, noting that "The county of Devon belonged to this Baldwin, and thus the noble possessions and heritages of the English daily devolved to foreigners."<sup>22</sup> Pushing these marriages further damaged her reputation. In the Petition of the Barons of 1258, they ask that women whose marriages were in the king's gift not be denigrated by being given to foreigners. English women should be married to true born English men. Matthew Paris expresses the resentment felt by the English that Savoyard girls were being pressed on English heirs. While marital maneuvering was within the king's purview, many of his great English landholding families seeking to arrange strategic marriages saw their efforts thwarted. This resentment turned into a hardening against the king's policies and would lead to baronial opposition in the years to come. It is likely that Eleanor was held primarily responsible by the nobility.<sup>23</sup>

While Paris's Chronicle accounts make it clear that he viewed the queen and her husband as exclusively loyal to the Savoyards at the expense of their English subjects, in truth, Eleanor's favor was not limited to her kin. She maintained strong ties with English men and women in her household. These included regular visitors to the castle such as Simon and Eleanor de Montfort, Richard of Cornwall and her sister Sanchia, and Joan, wife of William de Valence, the king's half-brother. She also kept solid ties with many in the aristocracy, and

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<sup>22</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 3:219

<sup>23</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 52-54.

most importantly she was working to ensure strong alliances with royal administrators such as John Mansel, William Kilkenny, and Henry of Wingham. All three of these administrators were influential in the king's council, with each of them having served as keeper of the great seal, and each having diplomatic experience. All three of the men worked well with the Savoyards, and there is every indication that each enjoyed personal associations with the queen, that they had gained the confidence of the queen, and each would play important roles in the court and in diplomatic negotiations.<sup>24</sup>

The arrival of the Lusignans<sup>25</sup> presented new issues for Eleanor. Henry III welcomed them with open arms, and his typical largesse. While Eleanor and Peter of Savoy maintained tight control over Edward's affairs, Eleanor found that the king's bonds with his kin were stronger than his bonds with the Savoyards. This antagonism between the Lusignans and Savoyards reached a crisis point in 1252, which led to a falling out between Eleanor and her husband. Their relationship was already under stress as Eleanor had taken a more direct interest in politics. In her late twenties, Eleanor saw an opportunity to craft her own image. She did so with confidence, and without rejecting her role as a supportive wife and mother, but these new steps she took had brought her into conflict with the king.<sup>26</sup> Conflict with her husband was not something she sought, and she attempted to pacify him. However, the main players in the Lusignan versus Savoyard event caused a rift that would separate them for a

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<sup>24</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 56. John Mansel was trusted by the queen to take part in the negotiations for Edward's marriage, and to help deal with issues of her daughter, Margaret in Scotland. Eleanor worked closely with William Kilkenny during her regency. Henry of Wingham ultimately became a member of her council, and later on his protégé, Hugh de la Penne became keeper of Eleanor's wardrobe.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid, 54. The Lusignans were the king's half-brothers and a sister from the second marriage of his mother, Isabella of Angeloulême.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 64-66. Their disagreements stemmed from the king's disintegrating relationship with Simon de Montfort particularly over the Gascony campaign, and the queen's friendlier approach to dealing with Simon, something the king saw as less than supportive.

time as it became, in the words of Matthew Paris, the friends of the king against those of the queen. The warring parties were Eleanor's uncle, Archbishop Boniface and the king's half-brother, Aymer, the bishop-elect of Winchester. Matthew Paris reported that the conflict centered on the appointment of a vacant post of the prior of St. Thomas at Southwark and the subsequent mistreatment of Boniface's official. News of the mistreatment and subsequent escalation of the situation by both parties angered Eleanor and Peter of Savoy. The king was also angered, however he seemed unwilling to act against his half-brothers at this point, and perhaps due to the already strained undercurrent between Henry and his wife, he instead turned his anger on her, taking all of her lands, and suspending her control of the queen's gold before sending her off to Guilford. Boniface's return to court a few weeks later personalized the conflict. He showed little patience for the Lusignans and began publicly excommunicating those involved. The conflict soon involved the realm, with Matthew Paris characterizing it as a battle between the alien factions at court who were fighting over who would gain superiority over England to the exclusion of its natives. The queen, who had remained in touch with both Peter and Boniface of Savoy worked towards reconciliation. She was back in the court by the end of November with control of her lands and queen's gold restored.<sup>27</sup> The king realized in order to reconcile all parties involved he needed his wife's help. According to Matthew Paris, Henry III worked on Aymer while Eleanor worked on Boniface. Eventually their efforts would pay off as Boniface gave the kiss of peace and the incident was considered closed. Trust was restored between Eleanor and Henry III, and the couple were collaborating once again. The ill relations between the Lusignans and Savoyards

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<sup>27</sup>CR, vol. VII, 283.

would persist. For now tensions had cooled and the Savoyards continued to counsel the king and queen, and they would play a prominent part in the Sicilian business.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 3:2-12.; Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 67-69.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SICILIAN BUSINESS

In December of 1253, Pope Innocent IV offered up the Sicilian throne to King Henry III, and in February of 1254, Henry III accepted the offer on behalf of his younger son, Edmund. The Sicilian crown was the throne of Regno, a diverse kingdom that included southern Italy and Sicily. The papacy had been seeking to bring the region under their control upon the death of Emperor Frederick II whose son, Conrad, had taken control of the kingdom. Pope Innocent IV knew and communicated to Henry III that it would require a tremendous force to oust Conrad, and the papacy had already offered the crown to both Henry's brother, Richard of Cornwall, and upon his refusal, King Louis IX's younger brother, Charles of Anjou. Knowing the difficulties involved, both men had rejected the offer, though Charles of Anjou had strongly entertained the idea. So it came to Henry III who acceptance came while he was still embroiled in his troubled Gascony campaign. Matthew Paris states that the pope "sent his messengers to privately speak to the king of England to work upon his simplicity..."<sup>1</sup>

Financial tensions had been on the rise during the early 1250s, and the period became a time of increasing discontent with Henry's government, particularly among the English clergy who bore a large burden of the taxes funding the various campaigns. Henry's monetary issues would be a constant source of struggle for him as the Sicilian business unfolded. Much of the financial strain started with Henry's disastrous Gascony expedition. In

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 3:89.

1250, Henry announced he was taking the cross, but he was unable to immediately leave, perhaps due to the ongoing conflict with Gascony and the need to raise the tax funds to accomplish it. Evidence of his inability to leave right away can be found in a *Patent Roll* entry marked on October 30, 1250 which mandated “to all crusaders coming to London on the morrow of All Souls to return home until further order, as the king cannot at present arrange for his passage to the Holy Land as he proposed.”<sup>2</sup> Henry was eager to get going on his crusade. He had watched his brother, Richard crusade to the Holy Land, as well as various other in-laws and even Louis IX, and now it was his turn. First he would need to bring Gascony under control and the man he had entrusted with the job, Simon de Montfort, was struggling with the task. An entry made on June 13, 1251 in the Patent Rolls states in view of the discords between Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester, the king’s lieutenant in Gascony, and the diverse magnates, citizens of Bayonne, and others of the land of Gascony... and it was provided by the council that the king of his eldest son Edward should go to Gascony... to take measures for the state of Gascony.<sup>3</sup>

A subsequent entry written just three days later on June 16, 1251 illustrates de Montfort’s heavy hand in the region and the problems it was causing for the king. This specific entry makes note of a grant to William de Ermundares allowing him to rebuild his home which de Montfort had demolished.<sup>4</sup> The Gascony campaign was not wrapping up as Henry III had hoped, complaints were coming in on the conduct of Simon de Montfort which was causing tension between the two men, and the entire campaign was holding up Henry’s

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<sup>2</sup>CPR, vol. IV, 129.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 198.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 198.

departure on crusade. In June of 1252, Henry III finally settled on the date of his departure for the Holy Land. The Patent Rolls record an entry on June 8 where Henry sets the date of his departure “for four years from Midsummer Day, 1252.”<sup>5</sup> Henry’s crusade was set for 1256.

In 1253, continued troubles in Gascony, many of which are recorded in the Patent Rolls and Simon de Montfort’s eventual recall from the area ensured that Henry III would need to personally oversee bringing the region back under control. In July of 1253, Henry appointed Queen Eleanor as regent of the realm with his brother, Richard, as her counsel, entrusting her with carrying out his will.<sup>6</sup> Money continued to be collected by the churches for the pending crusade to the Holy Land. A memorandum on May 17, 1254, found in the *Patent Rolls* indicates the clergy’s continued collection of funds for Henry as detailed in a record of a parliament hearing held with Eleanor, Richard of Cornwall, the bishops of Norwich and Chichester, and the abbot of Westminster three weeks after Easter. They then divided the provinces, cities, and dioceses between themselves that they would be collecting the required tenth needed for the king’s crusade.<sup>7</sup>

Henry III would gain control of the Gascony region through the marriage of his heir, Edward to King Alfonso of Castile’s sister, Eleanor in 1254, the same year that Henry III accepted the papal offer of the Sicilian crown for his younger son Edmund. In accordance with the peace accord, Henry III requested that the papacy commute his pledge to travel to the Holy Land to an obligation to join King Alfonso in his own expedition against Morocco

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 214.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 269.

<sup>7</sup>CPR, vol. IV, 370.



and Africa. Henry III, upon his acceptance of the grant of the kingdom of Sicily was already looking to the papacy to convert his commitment to go on crusade to obtaining the throne of Sicily. In 1256 Henry III was forced to tell Alfonso that he would have to postpone any participation in the Castilian crusade in order to fulfill his obligation to the new Pope Alexander IV in the quest for Sicily.<sup>8</sup>

In March of 1254, the papal diplomat, Albert of Parma formalized the concession to Edmund, and in May Pope Innocent confirmed the gift. Conrad had been a major obstacle against success in taking Sicily. Upon Conrad's death from malaria in May of 1254, that obstacle was removed. Just ten days after Conrad's death, Innocent IV wrote to Henry III, advising him not to commute his crusading vow as success was possible, and the Pope felt that Henry III could better aid the Holy Land from his future base in Sicily. Innocent IV was making significant progress in working out a deal that would allow the Pope to rule the Regno region and satisfy Frederick's natural son, Manfred. At this point, Innocent IV seemed to be holding Henry III in reserve. It was only after Manfred had stirred up a resistance and routed the papal forces that the pope began to work with Henry III on taking the region. A letter written from Pope Innocent IV to Queen Eleanor on June 11, 1254 asking her to encourage the king to focus on providing the support the papacy needed in Sicily highlights the urgency that Pope Innocent IV felt the king needed to show in regards to the matter.<sup>9</sup>

Pope Innocent IV's death in December of 1254 led to his successor, Alexander IV to immediately close the deal with Henry III. While Innocent IV had been resistant to commuting Henry's crusading vow, the new pope did not share his qualms, commuting the

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<sup>8</sup>Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century*, 120.

<sup>9</sup>Letter to Eleanor of Provence from Pope Innocent IV, June 11, 1254, accessed November 6, 2020, [epistolae.columbia.edu/letter/695.html](http://epistolae.columbia.edu/letter/695.html).

vow to the quest in Sicily. As Manfred gained more power, Alexander IV held Henry to the deal, stubbornly refusing to release him or look for more diplomatic solutions, and threatening his realm with excommunication if he failed to meet the terms. Pope Alexander IV was also pressing for peace with France, something that all parties agreed would be required for the successful promotion of Edmund's interest in Sicily as well as the security of Prince Edward who was now in Gascony. With her familial connection, Eleanor could help bridge the gap. In 1254 Henry and Eleanor set out from Gascony to visit France with the following considerations in mind: an interest in French architecture, an interest in visiting Fontevrault and Pontigny, and "an ardent desire to visit the French kingdom, his brother-in-law the king of France and the queen, who was sister to the queen of England."<sup>10</sup>

Eleanor likely had a hand in arranging the visit and it was truly a family affair as she and Henry travelled through Fontevrault, through Pontigny, and finally Chartres where they met with Louis IX and his queen Margaret, Eleanor's sister, as well as their younger sister Beatrice and her new husband Charles of Anjou, Count of Provence and Louis IX's brother. Their mother, Beatrice, the dowager countess of Provence was present, with a number of other Savoyard uncles and relatives. Sanchia also arranged to travel from England to Chartres. From Chartres they travelled to Paris where the visit was by all accounts a tremendous success. Even Matthew remarked that "the honour of the king of England, and of all the English, was much exalted and increased."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 134-136.; Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 3:104-6.

<sup>11</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 3:110.; Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 136-137. It was a true family gathering as all of the Dowager Countess Beatrice of Provence's family were present. This included all four of her daughters, three of their husbands, and at least two of her brothers.

This family peace deemed necessary for the interests of the Princes Edward and Edmund, would have a long lasting, positive consequence for both Henry and Eleanor during the troubled times on the horizon, and this peace was achieved through the bonds of loyalty that existed between the Provence/Savoy families. This family structure lying beneath the meeting was dependent on the five women involved, particularly the elder Beatrice of Provence and her two politically-minded elder daughters, Eleanor and Margaret. While they could not direct policy, they understood that they could influence it. In the short term, the peace did little to aid Henry and Eleanor in their quest to gain the Sicilian crown for Edmund. However, there would be lasting peace between France and England when they agreed to the Treaty of France in 1258, and it did provide stability for Prince Edward in Gascony. The influence of the Savoy-Provence women is more important than typically realized when looking at the influence of family and bonds of kinship on areas of military or political considerations.<sup>12</sup>

The Sicilian business was going from bad to worse. Henry faced opposition from both his magnates and the ecclesiastical assembly when the idea to shift money collected for the crusade to the Holy Land towards acquiring the throne of Sicily was presented in a parliamentary gathering. His magnates did not feel they had been properly summoned, per the agreement made in the 1215 Magna Carta, and his assembly were shocked at the idea that any monies they collected for Henry's crusade were now being converted to wage war on Christians in Italy. They protested the idea and offered stiff opposition to the entire scheme, blaming Peter Aigueblanche, Bishop of Hereford and a Savoyard noble, for preoccupying Henry III with the entire affair. To make matters worse, one of the papacy's great allies had

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<sup>12</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 136-138.; Cox, *Eagles of Savoy*, 270.

defected to Manfred, and the papal army had fallen apart. Pope Alexander IV was broke and unable to get any loans. He needed Henry III to send money so that he could hire knights and a captain to lead them. Alexander also expected Henry to then send a strong army to back them up. News of the papacy's loss arrived while the parliament was in session, further hardening the unwillingness of any of the magnates or assembly to prosecute the affair. In a lengthy letter written by Henry and sent to the cardinal deacon of Sant'Angelo with copies going to other cardinals and the papal notary highlights the outrage felt at the pope's demands. He protests the pope's demands for an additional 135,000 marks plus from Henry III with the threat of an interdict if he did not deliver the money. His letter goes on, begging the pope to be reasonable, and to allow him to come to Italy in order to negotiate the terms of continuing papal support for Edmund's Sicilian crown. He states that not working with him might damage the relationship between England the church.<sup>13</sup>

Henry now had a decision to make, and he was without his leading Savoyard counsel. Thomas and Peter of Savoy had been a part of negotiating the initial arrangements in the beginnings of the Sicilian affair in 1254 with Pope Innocent IV who was related to them. Henry hoped to enlist their aid again, but neither man was available, their attentions on other issues. Even Boniface of Savoy was away from England. While the brothers would have welcomed gaining Edmund the throne, particularly since it offered them power in Italy, they would have seen Alexander's terms as abysmal. If all the money raised went straight to the pope, there would be no money left over for any forces that they might raise. With the death of Pope Innocent IV, any inside track they might have had to negotiate a better deal with the

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<sup>13</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 3:122-24.; Carpenter, *Henry III*, 634-635.; CCR, vol. IX, 406-408.

papacy was gone. In reality they did not have the time or the resources to aid Henry in his battle against Manfred.<sup>14</sup>

Money was constantly an issue for Henry. The Gascony expedition had drained the royal coffers, and according to Matthew Paris had left the king in debt to the tune of 350,000 marks.<sup>15</sup> Now the papacy had demanded a commitment from Henry to take care of its war debts in the amount of 135,541 marks or roughly £90,000 and an English army to rid them of Frederick II's heirs with the sole enticement of handing the Sicilian throne over to Henry's son.<sup>16</sup> Between 1254 and 1258, Henry III had raised two gold treasures. Unable to win consent for taxation through parliament, Henry turned to other money-making ventures, pledging large quantities of royal jewelry and plate, but one of the most contentious methods was placing an ever-increasing burden upon his sheriffs by placing increments on the money they paid into the treasury. Increments were monies that the sheriffs collected above and beyond their county payments. As a result of this, Henry's subjects were put under tremendous financial stress, particularly as the sheriffs became even more heavy handed in order to meet Henry's need for cash, and to make some side profit for themselves. *The Fine Rolls* indicate this in the period between 1254 and 1258, showing the increased revenue Henry was taking in through fines, and the Patent Rolls show increased monetary pressure on the Jews of England.<sup>17</sup> This is important background information when looking at both the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 634-635.

<sup>15</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 3:143.

<sup>16</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 3:143.

<sup>17</sup>Carpenter, *Henry III*, 634-635; Ben Wild, "The Henry III Fine Rolls Project," Fine Rolls Henry III: Introduction to Reign, September 14, 2020, [https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/commentary/reign\\_intro.html](https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/commentary/reign_intro.html).; "The Henry III Fine Rolls Project," Fine Rolls Henry III: 39 HENRY III (28 October 1254–27 October 1255), September 14, 2020, [https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/roll\\_052.html](https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/roll_052.html).; CPR, 1247-55, 1255.

Sicilian Affair and Eleanor's relationship with her adopted country. As much as she was seen as the figurehead of the Savoyards in England, she was also the queen and she was as connected to both the unpopular policies of Henry III, as well as her natal family who were being blamed for enticing the king's attention to what the barons saw as a bad deal. Matthew Paris's narrative representing Henry as weak, foolish, and controlled by his wife only reinforces those connections.<sup>18</sup>

While Henry III did not have the money or the troops that the pope needed to undertake the military campaign, it is unlikely that the Savoyards were promoting a bad deal. The Savoyards, specifically Thomas of Savoy, did not think that they would need to take the Sicilian throne by force. Manfred had recently married their niece, Beatrice, which offered them more diplomatic routes to explore. In 1256, they suggested to Henry that Edmund be married to one of Manfred's daughters, and then he would be granted the kingdom while Manfred retained the province of Taranto. Henry agreed that this was a good move, and Peter of Savoy began the discussions, but Pope Alexander IV stubbornly continued to press for military action against Manfred, simply wanting Henry's money to further the papal campaign.<sup>19</sup>

Correspondence written in 1256 to Eleanor from Innocent's successor highlights Pope Alexander IV's desperation. It takes a similar tone as his predecessor as he urges the queen to take immediate action in a situation involving Thomas of Savoy and his enemies in Turin that threatened the papal campaign in Sicily. A similar letter was sent to the king.<sup>20</sup> It was not

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<sup>18</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 111.

<sup>19</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 134-135

<sup>20</sup>Letter to Eleanor of Provence from Pope Alexander IV, 1256, accessed on November 6, 2020, [epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/697.html](http://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/697.html).

unusual for clergy to use their connections with queens to obtain their goals. While these letters indicate that Eleanor was aware and likely supporting the bid for the Sicilian crown, it is not a smoking gun with which we can connect the entire failed business back to Eleanor of Provence. Both this letter and the correspondence written in 1254 by Pope Innocent IV are the only true evidence found in the primary record of Eleanor's involvement with the Sicilian situation.

Henry saw one positive with the crowning of Earl Richard and Sanchia of Provence the king and queen of the Romans at Aachen in 1257, a position which could help strengthen Edmund's claims to Sicily. Henry III remained unable to raise the funds required to fully realize a conquest of Sicily, and the quest would be unsuccessful. The papacy sought a stronger champion for their cause and worked with King Louis IX in 1263 to help oust Manfred. By 1264 a deal had been struck between Louis's brother Charles of Anjou, the Count of Provence, husband to Eleanor's younger sister, Beatrice, and a seasoned warrior who had been on Crusade with his brother. In return for being allowed to conquer the Regno region, Charles agreed to pay an annual tribute to the papacy, rule the region under papal control, and he was not allowed to conquer any other region in Italy that lay outside this kingdom.<sup>21</sup>

Acquiring the Sicilian crown would be far easier for Charles at this point. He was nearer to the region than Henry was, and capable of raising both men and money to achieve the papacy's end goals. In June of 1265, Charles of Anjou was crowned king of Sicily, a position that was likely strengthened by his marriage to Beatrice of Provence.<sup>22</sup> This was the

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<sup>21</sup>William Walsh, "Papal Strongman Charles of Anjou," *Medieval Warfare* 6, no. 2 (2016): 20-23 at 20.

<sup>22</sup>Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century*, 116-123.

absolute final straw for the barons and clergy who were mortified at at the debt that Henry III had incurred in his quest for the Sicilian crown, and horrified at the money that had already been thrown away on the venture, and likely saw the actions of the papacy and Charles of Anjou as double-dealing and underhanded, particularly in light of the Treaty of Paris which had seemingly unified the expansive family.<sup>23</sup>

Prior to approaching his barons for additional funding, the king had tried to remove himself from the papacy's web. As he negotiated peace with Louis IX he understood the difficulty that he faced, and likely knew that gathering the funds and manpower would be difficult if not impossible. Yet, Henry III also had real reason to believe that it could still be a successful venture. He had the house of Savoy negotiating for him, and his brother, Richard, had been elected the king of Germany, a position which would help spread pro-papal activity in Germany and northern Italy. Henry III was aware of the hold that Manfred had on southern Italy and Sicily, and he requested that Simon de Montfort and Peter of Savoy go to the papal court with the power to settle the entire business, and if they could not go, then he had sufficient alternatives in their place. Henry III was also prepared to relinquish Edmund's claim to Sicily if the pope thought it prudent, and if he would be released from financial burdens together with the threat of excommunication that Pope Alexander IV had been holding over their heads as a not-so-subtle extortion.<sup>24</sup>

Until recently, the Sicilian business has been dismissed by historians as a foolish endeavor taken on by a simple-minded king under the control of his manipulative wife. As modern historians take a second look, they are acknowledging that there might have been

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid, 116-123.

<sup>24</sup>Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century*, 116-23.



more to recommend the adventure than initially believed, and Henry might have had real reasons to believe he could succeed, particularly since the Savoyards were involved. The Sicilian event is important in the political history of Henry III's kingship, and it is also an event that is used to gauge the political acumen of Eleanor of Provence. Historical accounts claim that this was an important project to Eleanor of Provence, and one to which she was committed, though there is limited evidence in the primary resources as to the depth of her involvement. She also takes the lion's share of the blame for its failure despite evidence to the contrary. We can say two things with certainty: a) as a dedicated mother, settling Edmund's future was of the utmost importance to her and she trusted her natal family to look after her son's interests; b) she involved herself in arranging a number of politically convenient marriages meant to promote influences in northern Italy and solidify English connections for both her son and the Savoyards who were in charge of working the Sicilian scheme out. From October of 1254, her uncle, Thomas of Savoy, became the dominant figure in the scheme, and after that date, Eleanor can be found collaborating with him in setting up several beneficial marriages. One such example of a marriage arranged with this in mind is that of John de Vescy's marriage to Agnes of Saluzzo as referenced in the Savoyard section.<sup>25</sup>

Arranging marriages is not proof of masterminding the quest for the Sicilian throne. The primary sources offer no additional evidence to suggest that Eleanor had anything beyond a supporting role in the affair. Promoting marriages was a primary way that Eleanor could exercise her agency as queen in support of the goals of her uncles and her husband,

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<sup>25</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 134-135.

particularly as it pertained to the welfare and future success of her children. The 1250s were a time of stress and upheaval for the English crown and Eleanor was not immune to that.

The king had accepted the Sicilian commitment without consulting the magnates of his kingdom and they repeatedly refused to authorize the raising of new taxes for an expedition they had not agreed to.<sup>26</sup> The English clergy saw the ordeal as a fight to maintain their liberties as they were also squeezed for money. The money they had raised had gone for nothing. The pope had allowed for the diversion of Crusades funds to be transferred to the Sicilian campaign. An entry made in the Close Rolls on December 19, 1255 indicates that Henry III was given permission to use the money raised for “the Cross” in order to acquire the Sicilian kingdom for Edmund. The pope instructs the abbot of Westminster, who was collecting the Crusades money which was 1/10 of the annual income of all dioceses and large monasteries that Henry wanted 4000 livres tournois to purchase mercenaries for his campaign.<sup>27</sup>

Letters written from Henry III to the Pope, the cardinals, and other members of the papal court can be found in the Close Rolls, dated around April of 1256 though there is no date written on the letters. The letters indicate that Henry III was writing the papal court begging for more money to promote the Sicilian Campaign.<sup>28</sup> The papacy never came up with anything more to aid Henry.

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<sup>26</sup>Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century*, 134. In 1257 the magnates drew up a list of objections which included the distance between England and Sicily, the success of Manfred, and the intolerable cost and waste. In 1258, however, they were forced to decide between helping Henry under specific conditions or risk seeing their lands put under interdiction. In an interview with the king, seven men detailed the conditions of their help, and Henry agreed. This included moderated terms from the pope and a set of reforms that would come to be known as the Provisions of Oxford.; Prestwich, *English Politics*, 118.

<sup>27</sup>Cox, *Eagles of Savoy*, 250-305.; CR, vol. IX, 380-381.

<sup>28</sup>CR, vol. IX, 404-409.

The failure of the Sicilian business lies with papal obstinacy and double dealing, together with the refusal of the English clergy and the barons to pay for the venture. However, Matthew Paris's narrative which expressly associated Eleanor and her family with the unpopular affair, harmed her reputation, and ultimately led to her taking the blame for the failure.

Matthew's biases can once again be found in his dislike of the papacy and his support of the discontent from the clergy, who were under pressure from the pope to pay for a good deal of the costs of the Sicilian business. This discontent would lead to their later support of Simon de Montfort's administration and to reforms of the crown. Because Eleanor had supported and lent her political influence to the Sicilian business, she was held equally responsible by the clergy though she had ultimately had little to do with it.<sup>29</sup>

Her Uncle Boniface, Archbishop of Canterbury, was caught between familial loyalty, and obedience to the pope, supported the English Church against the crown. This battle would lead to a set of constitutions that Henry III saw as an aggression against the rights of the Crown. He laid this defiance on Boniface and the affair caused great stress between the two men, with Eleanor stuck in the middle. This discontent spread to the idea of royal misgovernment and oppression among the barons and lesser nobles, it had reached a point of being intolerable. The main factors for this discontent were the heavy debt that resulted from the Gascony campaign, and a sense of panic that had been incurred by the king's commitment to the pope regarding the Sicilian business which had led to financial extortion through the exchequer, the eyre, and forests visitations. This extortion had resulted from the king's awareness of his mounting debts. A second factor was the king's protection of favored

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<sup>29</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*, 138-139.

courtiers and magnates in the face of all complaints against them. A purported example of this is recorded by Matthew Paris who makes note that an order was issued stating no writs should be issued from chancery against the interests of Richard of Cornwall, Peter of Savoy or the king's half-brothers. Eleanor would have enjoyed similar protection.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid, 138-139.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Eleanor of Provence was a valuable asset to King Henry III of England. She was a loyal wife and mother, a savvy political partner, and a woman who learned to navigate the patriarchal society she lived in so that she could have a voice and make a difference in her society. She was an active woman who lived by her convictions but she was also a human being, with the same flaws, foibles, and complexities that are found in everyone. As much as she was a dedicated wife, mother, and friend she was equal parts an avid protector of her family's interests and of her son's birthright, the crown of England. She maintained an active political role while counterbalancing her more personal role as that of a supportive wife to the king.

Henry's reliance on her counsel, as well as the counsel of her Savoyard/Provençal family opened up doors for her that allowed her personal power to reach new heights. The ideas promulgated by Matthew Paris in his *Chronicles* of a king who listened exclusively to Eleanor's foreign family at the expense of his own people is problematic, driven by his biases, and not supported by the administrative evidence of the time. Henry did have several English advisors who most certainly had his ear, were important to him both personally and in his own career as king, and who could influence him. Two of the most important of these men were his brother, Richard of Cornwall, a man who was vocal in his advice to his older brother as Paris correctly notes in his *Chronicles*, but who was also driven by his own goals and agenda and whose loyalty to the crown was not always a certainty for Henry III or Eleanor; and Simon de Montfort, his brother-in-law, another man with a strong personality whom would later turn into a bitter rival for his throne. Henry III was driven by his own

goals that were both tied to his father's failures—the loss of ancestral land being one example, and that were also uniquely his. Henry had continental ambitions, and the Savoyards provided him strong allies that he could use for either diplomatic or militaristic needs. Access to this family through his wife Eleanor provided him a connection that allowed him to pursue those ambitions. Rewarding them handsomely and welcoming them with open arms was his method of cultivating these relationships to meet his goals.<sup>1</sup>

While Eleanor certainly enjoyed a good marriage and unprecedented influence with her husband, the fact remains that the Savoyards provided Henry III a doorway into the European opportunities he sought, and he provided them with a doorway into English influence. The relationship between the groups, while symbiotic in nature, was not reliant on the manipulations of a vapid queen as Matthew Paris and other historians have suggested over the years.<sup>2</sup>

These characterizations were a way to indict him as less than a man or to feminize him as a direct insult, thus undermining his rule. Throughout his chronicle, Paris writes with little detachment from the subject he is recording, and it is here that we can begin to isolate a bias that influenced how he wrote about the king and queen. The two main targets incurring Paris's wrath were the Papacy and Henry III. His hostile stance towards the two men can be sourced back to the fact that they both exercised authority over St. Albans. Prior to the thirteenth century, St. Albans had enjoyed autonomy from the crown and the pope. By the thirteenth century, this had changed, and there were increasing financial demands placed upon them from both Rome and Henry. Additionally, they were now interfering with the

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<sup>1</sup>H.W. Ridgeway, "Foreign Favourites and Henry III's Problems of Patronage, 1247-1258" *The English Historical Review*, 104, no. 412 (1989) 590-610 at 591.

<sup>2</sup>Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*. His Lusignan brothers also had Henry's ear.; Carpenter, *Henry III*, p. 208.

election of the bishops and the abbots, and placing their own appointees to the benefices.

While this practice had been going on for centuries, Matthew of Paris writes as if Henry III was the first king to have forced his will upon an abbey.<sup>3</sup>

An example of this bias can be found in the pages of the *Chronica Majora* in an entry dated to the year 1246. In the entry Matthew is speaking of the appointment of William of York, who was elected bishop of Salisbury. Matthew writes “that the canons of Salisbury, finding that no one hardly would be acceptable to the king, unless a person belonging to his court, in order to guard against peril to their church and to gain the king’s good will, unanimously elected William of York, a most familiar clerk of the king...”<sup>4</sup>

Paris’s writing seems to quasi absolve Henry III for the decisions he made in his role as king and instead places much of the responsibility on his wife, even while he lacked awareness of court politics that affected the running of a kingdom. Paris believed what he wrote about Eleanor of Provence, and his representation of her offers historians insight into the patriarchal structure of the medieval society that Matthew and Eleanor of Provence both took part in. Paris’s writing had the intended goal to demean Henry, show him as a fool, and feminize him by suggesting that he was not man enough to control his wife, a woman that medieval society said should be subordinate to him, but whom they perceived was allowed to run the kingdom. This was a way to insult the kingship and demean a woman who had stepped out of her expected role and exercised power over them.

Calling Matthew Paris’s accounts of Henry III and Eleanor of Provence out as faulty does not mean that the nobles did not have some valid complaints against Henry for his

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<sup>3</sup>Dahmus, *Seven Medieval Historians*, 184.

<sup>4</sup>Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, 2:196-197.

perceived alienation of their counsel, or that there is no room for criticism during their tenure on the throne. Nor does it imply that we cannot glean valuable historical information from his writings. Questioning the validity of his accounts does, however, have the goal of calling out modern historian's acceptance of the Chronicles as an unbiased account of their reign, and their failure to properly identify the biases which directed his narrative, particularly as it pertains to Eleanor of Provence, and hold those accounts in comparison with the administrative records that were meticulously kept by Henry III's court. This early dislike of Eleanor reflects more than just a deep distrust of foreigners on the part of England and Matthew Paris, it highlights the anti-feminist attitude that was prevalent in the thirteenth century, and the tendencies of all historians, past and modern, to present women as destabilizing forces within a court. Historian's failures to properly identify and historicize the patriarchal structure that has and continues to exist as an ideological system in our society is a main problem in how women's history is relayed, particularly as it runs as an undercurrent through political, economic, social, and just about any other type of history imaginable.

Patriarchy is a term that has several different uses. For the purposes of this thesis, the use of the word patriarchy refers to the societal structure that men have used to determine what part women shall play or not play, and in which the female is subservient to males, and it should be applied as a lens that we study women's history through, particularly if we want a more complete history.<sup>5</sup> While Eleanor of Provence may have wielded more power than many men in her social circle, she was still forced to play a part in a system that had been set up before her time. By attempting to both navigate this system while finding her own voice in it, she rocked the provincial boat and was held to a double standard. As stated in the

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<sup>5</sup>Judith M. Bennett, "Patriarchal Equilibrium," in *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 54-81.



introduction, women's role in society were dictated by the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, and for Christians, the Hebrew kingdom, all three of which were patriarchal by nature. There were specific roles that any woman, but particularly women of Eleanor's status were expected to play. Stepping outside of those roles was viewed harshly, particularly by monks such as Matthew Paris, who had little experience with women or royal courts, but whose views were dictated by the canon law he believed in. Moderns historians, men and women alike, have continued to promulgate this issue by accepting Paris's account of Eleanor's career as queen as completely accurate, ignoring the role that patriarchy has played in both human history overall, but specifically in women's history that has led to the failure to correctly adapt historical practice, and by continuing to engage and fall back on patriarchal systems in existence today.

Eleanor's career as queen and then as queen mother to Edward I amount to a total of fifty-five years and her life and career are worth studying and understanding as she played a major role in the history of England. Her lengthy reign is too long and her numerous exploits too many to explore for the purposes of this thesis. My main goal has been to challenge some of the lesser explored historical perceptions that circulate in her historiography, shine light on her voice, and highlight the issues that exist in the problematic chronicle accounts of her career as queen, specifically those of Matthew Paris as he is considered the gold standard on the reign of Henry III. Women's history is a burgeoning field, at once expansive, yet fraught with specific tensions on how best to relay that feminine history. Yet it is through this re-examination of her life in this field that her life and actions are coming to light. The comparison of primary administrative records to the chronicle accounts written during her lifetime is bringing about a greater objectivity to her life and reign.

Her career as queen was distinctly political, a fact that was uncomfortable to the men that were her contemporaries, as well as early historians that assessed and silenced her, laying the foundation for later historical generations to come. Her husband, far from being the simple man that Matthew Paris and others of his ilk portrayed, relied upon her intelligence, allowing her some room in which she could exercise her voice, support him, and even rule in his stead when he was away in Gascony. It is also through his administrative reforms and copious record keeping that we are able to re-assess their reign and offer a fair assessment and more complete understanding of their place in English history. Eleanor was the sum of many parts, a good wife, loving but possessive mother, harsh land owner, and loyal friend. She was a woman who did not fold under pressure and she found a way to rise above the obstacles in her path. The end result was an active, successful queen worthy of carrying the ancient Roman description of virago.

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## VITA

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