
Two reputed representations of Eleanor of Aquitaine from her lifetime – a re-evaluation:

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Representations of the most famous queen of the medieval era are to be valued beyond rubies by the queen's innumerable fans, and also by those in the heritage industry. Yet until relatively recently aside from the depiction of Eleanor in the window of the cathedral at Poitiers and her own tomb effigy, there were no reputedly attributed depictions of her dating from her lifetime¹.

All this changed in 1965 when M. Albert Heron, engaged on restoration work in the Chapelle Ste-Radegonde in Chinon, uncovered the "Chasse Royale" mural ("the Radegonde Mural"). Since then this image has been widely accepted as a depiction of the Plantagenet family – or part of it, with debate centring on whether Eleanor is truly to be identified with the central figure, and who the other figures are.

A similarly exciting moment occurred in 2016 when the graduate student Jesus Rodriguez Veijo identified the figure on the Beatus page of the c. 1180 "Fecamp Psalter" with Eleanor, relying in part on the scholarship relating to the Radegonde representation.² It has since, in reliance on this attribution, been dubbed the "Psalter of Eleanor of Aquitaine" by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (the National Library of the Netherlands), where it resides.³

This article revisits the evidence for both these identifications, and posits a theory that while the same person may well have commissioned both depictions, only one, the Psalter, should be regarded as attempting to portray Eleanor herself.

I. THE RADEGONDE MURAL

To take first the Radegonde mural, it is important before commencing this re-evaluation to establish what the item is, and what the theories have been to date.

The mural is located in a chapel devoted to Ste Radegonde which is essentially an annex to another chapel which marks the site of the cell and the tomb of another saint of the same era, St John of Chinon; also known as "Jean le Reclus" (see Figure 1). St John was a sixth century

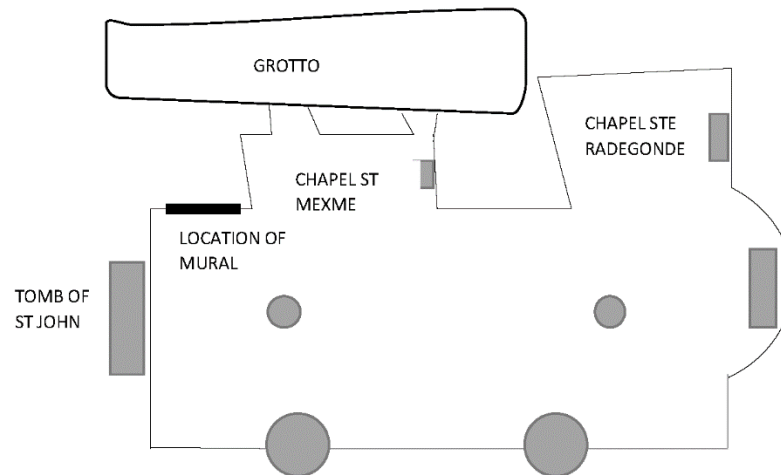
¹ The following references are used in this article: *CLR* with years: *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*; BSAVC, with volume, part, years: *Bulletin de la Société des Amis du Vieux-Chinon*; Torigni: Robert of Torigni, *Chronicles, Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, vol 4, The Chronicle of Robert of Torigni (London, Longman, 1890); Flori: Jean Flori, *Aliénor d'Aquitaine: La reine insoumise* (Paris, 2004) *Queen and Rebel* (Edinburgh 2007); Owen: Owen, D.D.R., *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen and Legend*, (Oxford, 1993); Pernoud: Pernoud, Régine, *Aliénor d'Aquitaine* (Paris, new edn, 1965)

² J. Viejo, *Royal Manuscript Patronage in late Ducal Normandy: A Context for the Female Patron Portrait of the Fecamp Psalter* in *Cerae: An Australasian Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 3, (2016)

³ <https://www.kb.nl/en/themes/medieval-manuscripts/psalter-of-eleanor-of-aquitaine-ca-1185>

recluse who inhabited a cell in a grotto in the town. Here he had created a little oratory and a garden where he lived, died and was buried.

Figure 1: Layout of the Grotto



In summer 1964 M. Heron was in charge of the archaeological review of the chapel. It was in August that he discovered the fresco, 2.15m long by 1.15m high, which was quickly the subject of much excitement and speculation.⁴

A starting point is to give as neutral as possible a description of the mural itself (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The Radegonde mural (picture:Chinpat)



⁴ BSAVC, VI, 9, 1965 lists the different papers and magazines around the world which featured it as a story

If one labels the persons 1-5 from right to left (because of the direction of travel) they are as follows:

Person 1: Bearded man on a white horse. He wears what appears to be a crown. He sits on a red saddle cloth and wears a green robe. Over this he has a yellow cape clasped on one shoulder. Its lining is patterned in alternating soft v shapes of green/blue and white.

Person 2: Uncrowned dark haired figure. Hair at least to shoulder length – may be clubbed. Appears youthful or feminine. Raises right hand in open gesture at chest level. Riding a bay horse with a yellow saddle cloth. Wears a maroon gown with wheel type patterns and a blue cape clasped at the shoulder (lining not visible).

Person 3 (riding behind Person 2): Crowned figure with chestnut hair to above shoulders. Appears younger than Person 1. Rides a dark horse. Wears a yellow gown with a green cape clasped at the shoulder. Cape lining has a similar patter to Person 1, but colours are clear blue and white. Reaching hand back towards ...

Person 4: Youthful figure with blond hair wearing a brown pointed cap. Rides chestnut horse with a brown saddle cloth. Wears a green gown and blue cape. Lining similar but less distinct than the lining of Person 3's cape. Reaches a (?gloved) hand forward bearing a hawk

Person 5: Youthful figure with longer/clubbed blond hair wearing a white cap. Wearing brown robe and yellow cape with similar lining to Person 4.

M. Heron provided the first theory as to who the mural depicted. He described 1 as a king, 2 as a young woman, 3 as a young man crowned with a diadem and 4 and 5 as young men. In his leading article on the subject in *Archeologia* he posited the central figures as representing the “abduction” of Isabelle of Angouleme from Hugh of Lusignan by Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine’s youngest son John.⁵

In 1965 a quartet of articles appeared in the *Bulletin de la Société des Amis du Vieux-Chinon*. In one M Heron gave further consideration to his reading. In the second Oscar Tapper concluded that they must be of the Plantagenet family, for whom Chinon was a favourite fortress. He posited Person 3 (Heron's crowned young man) as a queen, with Person 2 being also a woman. After considering various possible combinations of Plantagenet personalities he advocated a John, Berengaria, Isabella of Angoulême combination for Persons 1-3. He rejected Person 3 as Eleanor in a Henry/Eleanor combination because Person 3 was “incontestably” a younger person than Person 1.⁶

At the same time Olivier Beigbedier, a professor at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, noting the possibility of a debate as to whether the picture represented some Plantagenets or Radegonde with King Clothair, did not pursue that aspect of the debate. Instead he noted interesting symbolism in the painting. He also argued that three of the cloak linings with blue and white patterning were depictions of vair. The fourth article was one by Mientras Thibout suggesting a representation of an episode from the Grail quest.⁷

⁵ *Archeologia* February 1965, 81-6

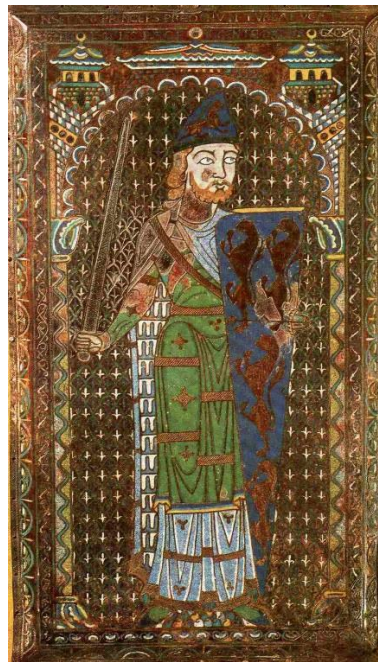
⁶ A. Heron, “Découverte de peintures murales à la chapelle Sainte-Radegonde de Chinon“, BSAVC VI, 9, 1965, p. 486 O. Tapper, “Quels sont les personnages représentés sur la “Chasse Royale” de la chapelle Ste Radegonde“, BSAVC VI, 9, 1965, p. 497

⁷ O. Beigdeber, “Essai d’interpretation symbolique de la “Chasse royale” de la Chapelle Ste-Radegonde“,

The next year the same source published an article by Suzanne Trocme, a specialist in medieval costume.⁸ Her expertise confirmed the dating of the painting to around the start of the thirteenth century and favoured the original view of the picture as featuring four male riders and one female – a young girl.

There the mystery rested for some years, though the possible ascription of the central figure as Eleanor seems to have taken hold, with the picture featuring in Regine Pernoud's and D.D.R. Owen's biographies of Eleanor. In 1998 Nurith Kenan-Kedaar⁹ wrote an influential article positing that the mural depicted Eleanor of Aquitaine being led into captivity and being accompanied by her daughter Joanna and two of her sons - including Richard, to whom she is giving a falcon, as a symbol of passing on the ducal power. Her hypothesis is that it was commissioned by Eleanor, essentially as a response to Henry's "Revolt of the Eaglets" depiction of his sons' rebellion, which Gerald of Wales reports being installed in a room at Winchester. As to timing, she placed the commission between Eleanor's release and death and probably after the release of Richard- giving the presence in the chapel of St Radegonde, who fled captivity, a double resonance. Unpersuaded by the vair analysis of Beigbedier, she saw the lining of the cloaks as signifying a Plantagenet marking, comparing it to the memorial of Geoffrey le Bel at Le Mans, whose cloak has similar triangular blue and white patterning (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Tomb enamel of Geoffrey le Bel



This theory immediately attracted comment, with Jean Flori, in his biography of Richard I, broadly accepting the thesis.

BSAVC VI, 9, 1965, p. 502; M. Thibout, "A propos de la découverte des peintures murales de la Chapelle Ste-Radegonde", BSAVC VI, 9, 1965, p. 489

⁸ BSAVC, VI, 10, 1966

⁹ "Aliénor d'Aquitaine conduite en captivité. Les peintures murales commémoratives de Sainte-Radegonde de Chinon", CCM 41, 164, 1998.p. 319.

However objection was taken by other commentators; *inter alia* to the likelihood of this episode being chosen as a subject for the wall of the chapel and also to the hypothesis that the figure in question is even female.

Chief amongst the commentators was Ursula Nielgen. In a 1999 article and also in another 2004 article¹⁰ she argued that all five figures are men. She suggested it is a picture of Henry with his sons after the rebellion of 1173/4 when the family had been reconciled - all except for Eleanor. Persons 4 and 5 are identified as Richard and Geoffrey by reason of their "comital" caps, which are similar to that worn by Geoffrey of Anjou on his tomb plaque.

Essentially in reply to the Kenaan-Kedar view also came that of Kleimann and Garcia.¹¹ They seem to accept the identification of the Plantagenet family, essentially by reason of the matching "Plantagenet" cloaks. However they suggest that her view neglects to contextualise the representation, in particular its proximity to the tomb of St John of Chinon. They also bring into focus the necessary question about whether the painting is a sole painting, or whether it is part of a larger lost work, as Nielgen suggests. They indicate that it is possible but doubtful that the proximity of the tomb of St John may be enough to explain a sole painting. Effectively they leave questions, including a question as to the need for a greater linkage between Eleanor and St Radegonde to justify her depiction here. In the same volume Ivan Cloulas echoed the doubts that the central figure was a woman at all; he favoured the view that all should be seen to be masculine.

In a further 2004 work in the *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Vieux Chinon*¹² Kleimann performed a contextualisation by reference to the accepted hypothesis that the scene is of the Plantagenets. She argued that it is a work of thanksgiving commissioned by Eleanor to celebrate her freedom, hence its placement in the chapel devoted to St Radegonde. She then advocated a reading with John leading the group, Eleanor and Isabella of Angouleme in the middle, and Eleanor's grandsons Otto of Brunswick and Arthur of Brittany in the rear.

Finally Cecile Voyer in Aurell's 2004 work on Eleanor¹³ reviews the evidence to date and notes that "for most of the specialists who have studied this image, it deals, without doubt, with the Plantagenets". She flags the possibility that the fresco is part of a larger work, the rest of which would render identification more simple. She indicates that even as a symbolic representation, it is surprising to find it in a holy place, noting Henry's famous "eaglets" representation being in his private chamber at Winchester.

So much for the theories so far. It is worth commencing by flagging a number of issues which are so far inadequately explained by these theses.

¹⁰ 1999: "Les Plantagenets à Chinon À propos d'une peinture murale dans la chapelle Sainte Radegonde" in ed Favreau et al *Iconographica. Mélanges offerts à Piotr Skubiszewski*, Poitiers, 1999, p. 154.; 2004: "The Wall Painting in the Chapel of Sainte-Radegonde at Chinon in the Historical Context" in *Cinquante années d'études médiévales. À la confluence de nos disciplines: Actes du Colloque organisé à l'occasion du cinquantième du CESC*, (Poitiers, 2003)

¹¹ "Les peintures murales de Sainte-Radegonde de Chinon. À propos d'un article récent", CCM 42, 168, 1999. p. 399

¹² D. Kleinmann 'A propos du Cortège royal de Sainte Radegonde', BSAVC, X., 8, 2004

¹³ "Les Plantagenêts et la chapelle Sainte-Radegonde de Chinon : une image en débat" in ed Aurell *Eleanor d'Aquitaine* (Poitiers 2004) pp 187-93.

The first is the point left hanging by Voyer. Is it not somewhat odd to find a representation of the Plantagenet royal family in a sacred space, rather than, as with the “Eaglets” depiction, in the castle in a domestic context?

The second is the question of why here? Commentators so far have made a (with respect) facile leap from Chinon the town, as a Plantagenet domain, to the location of the fresco. They say that to find such a representation in Chinon is logical, since it was such a key Plantagenet domain, or a location hypothesised for the commencement of Eleanor’s captivity and so on. But this is to adopt an unjustifiably “macro” view. If the Plantagenet family wanted a family portrait, one might expect it in the castle (as with the “eaglets” mural at Winchester), or (possibly) in the castle chapel. But the St Radegonde Chapel itself is some 20 minutes’ walk from the castle. Some reason for the positioning here, rather than more conveniently, ought to be given. Kleimann’s idea of an *ex voto* offering to St Radegonde comes nearest to doing this, though there remains the question of why Eleanor would be depicted herself. The “all male” theories offer no reason for the context. What is the relevance of St Radegonde to the male members of the Plantagenet family?

Thirdly none of the explanations give any real thought to the fact that the mural is not only in a chapel devoted to St Radegonde, but also one apparently created to mark the link between St Radegonde and St John, and also in such close proximity to the tomb of St John. Kleimann and Garcia have clearly flagged this as an issue, but there has been no answer to the question.

Finally none of the commentators so far has questioned whether the fresco might sensibly be taken to depict not the Plantagenets, but one or other of the saints honoured in the chapel. This last is a particularly glaring omission. Reasoning constructively, surely it must be the case that a fresco in a chapel (particularly a somewhat isolated chapel) would be most likely to represent something relevant to the saint or saints to whom it is dedicated? That being the case, before leaping to the conclusion that it is a domestic depiction of the ruling family of the area at the time of its creation, it would be more rigorous to exclude that first possibility.

So pursuing the constructive approach, which perhaps ought to have governed the quest thus far, here are some points to note.

St John of Chinon (or the Hermit) was a well-regarded saint of the period. There is evidence of his veneration at this spot in earlier centuries. St John’s own life offers little material to form the basis of this picture. He was apparently from Brittany. He came to Chinon to join the community started there by St Mexme, but came to install himself in a grotto as a hermit, where he tended the sick and grew his own food. As his celebrity grew he received visitors there. When he died, he was buried there and the cell became a place of pilgrimage in his honour.¹⁴

For St Radegonde the material available is much more detailed. She had three contemporary or near contemporary biographers: the nun Baudonivie, Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours. We also have some of her own surviving writings.¹⁵

Radegonde was born about 518AD, the daughter of King Berthachar of Thuringia. Her father was killed by her uncle Hermanfrid and Radegonde and her brother were taken into her

¹⁴ A Butler, *Lives of the Saints* (London 1956) Vol II p 654

¹⁵ Though a debate continues as to whether they are hers or the work of Fortunatus

uncle's household, where she seems to have formed an attachment to her cousin Amalfrid. Hermanfrid was himself defeated and killed by Clothair I, and Radegonde and her brother were taken prisoner by Clothair. They were brought up in the royal household and Radegonde was educated with a view to marrying Clothair; which she duly, but reluctantly, did, as his fifth wife. Radegonde was always very religious and devoted to good works and alms giving. Charitable work took up an increasing portion of her life, to the reported disgust of Clothair. Sometime around 548 Clothair had Radegonde's brother murdered, out of fear that he was conspiring revenge or to press his claim to the crown of Thuringia, to which he was the last surviving heir. Radegonde fled Clothair's court, determined to pursue a religious life. She encountered some difficulty in persuading a bishop to consecrate her for fear of her husband. It appears that St John of Chinon however gave encouragement to Queen Radegonde at this point in her life giving her a cilice over which he had prayed to remind her to resist temptation.¹⁶ She later sent him a valuable gift in gratitude for his support. Following her consecration she founded an Abbey just outside the walls of Poitiers named after a relic of the True Cross which she obtained at great expense from the Emperor Justin II. With the assistance of other religious supporters such as the bishop of Paris and St Junien of Mairé she prevailed on Clothair not to force her return to him. She spent the remainder of her life as a nun at her own foundation, having refused to take the role of Abbess. She persuaded Venantius Fortunatus, later bishop of Poitiers and her biographer, to take the role of bursar of the Abbey. She died and was buried in Poitiers and was canonised shortly after her death. Her own tomb lies in the church now dedicated to her, but which had previously been the church of Saint Marie "outside the walls". It became a place of pilgrimage after her death. The Abbey was supported by the family of Eleanor of Aquitaine, including Eleanor herself

Poitiers was, for obvious reasons, the primary location of the cult of St Radegonde. There is no record of a chapel to St Radegonde in Chinon until the thirteenth century. The first mention of it comes in 1269.¹⁷ However the style of the chapel is of the later twelfth century and the best evidence of the date of the mural places it rather to the late twelfth century than to the early thirteenth century. It seems likely therefore, that the chapel was built by someone with a veneration for St Radegonde who wished to commemorate the link between her and St John of Chinon. It is therefore not implausible, but on the contrary likely, that the builder of the chapel and the commissioner of the fresco are one and the same.

This brings one back to the fresco itself. It is located on a wall next to the tomb of St John in the inner of two naves (Figure 1, above). The wall on which it is painted contains two arches, and therefore there are three spaces where murals could go (left, centre and right). The painting occupies the left one of these spaces. The actual space dedicated to the chapel in honour of St Radegonde is within the right hand arch. Thus, putting aside the assumption in favour of the depiction of the Plantagenets, what one would expect is for this picture to pertain to the life of St Radegonde, or St John, or to their joint story.

There is no reason to preclude this. The grounds on which a Plantagenet identification have thus far been made are effectively threefold (i) the date of the painting (ii) the style of the

¹⁶ St. Gregory of Tours. *Glory of the confessors* (ed. and transl. Raymond Van Dam; Translated Texts for Historians 4), Liverpool 2004, c. 23

¹⁷ E. Lorans, "Saint-Mexme de Chinon Ve-XXe siècle", in *Archeologie et histoire de l'art* 22, Paris 2006, 508

clothing being contemporary with that date (iii) two royal subjects within the picture and (iv) the “Plantagenet lined” blue and white capes.

As for the first, the date of the painting does not drive a conclusion as to who it portrays; it simply excludes portrayals of those born later. Nor does the style of clothing much assist; an artist of the twelfth century might well portray people of an earlier era as if wearing modern dress, just as modern productions of Shakespeare are often put into modern dress to assist in bringing their relevance home to an audience. Certainly the representation of the Maccabees in the Painted Chamber at Westminster depicts them in thirteenth century clothing. There is therefore no reason to assume that the period of the clothing must dictate the period being represented.¹⁸ The third reason is equally no reason – there could well be other subject groups which incorporated two royal personages. Further it is at least arguable that the “royal” subjects are not necessarily royal at all, the headdresses being possibly not crowns but some other form of jewelled headgear which might be worn by noble but not necessarily royal persons. It is, however, fair to say that the depictions of the “crowns” match well with those in the window commissioned by Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II in Poitiers Cathedral.

This leaves the “Plantagenet” cloaks. As will be apparent from the outline of the arguments given above, it is in reality these which have formed the central plank of the identification for most of those writing on the subject. It is however no real basis for any attribution. The pattern is not unique; on the contrary it is a well-known representation of vair – as indeed Heron said in his earliest articles and as Beigbeider also noted. The idea of the depiction as being of a distinctive blue and white pattern particularly associated with the Plantagenets is a subsequent accretion. Attractive as it is, given its appearance on the memorial enamel to Geoffrey le Bel, it does not withstand scrutiny. Vair can be seen in other contemporary depictions of other high status subjects. Examples include: in the Dalimova chronicle or in the Codex Manesse as well as Book of Hours in the Morgan Library MS M.754 fol. 113v.¹⁹ Further any doubt about what is intended to be represented can be dispelled simply by looking at vair itself. It can be seen even today in the court robes of the French Court of Cassation (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Robes of the French Court de Cassation (www.philippebilger.com)



¹⁸ I am grateful to Michael Prestwich for highlighting to me the point on the clothing of the Maccabees. P. Binski, *The Painted Chamber at Westminster*, Society of Antiquaries Occasional Paper 9 (London 1986) 24–31.

¹⁹ Pictured at: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moda_europeia_do_s%C3%A9culo_XIV

In short, the individuals in the fresco wear the cape not because they are all members of one family and that robe is peculiar to that family, but because they are all of high status, and can afford to wear vair. Thus the confident ascription of the images to the Plantagenet family can be put to one side. That is not to say that they may not be representations of the family, but other possibilities should also be considered.

Voyer dismisses the possibility of a Radegonde link on the basis that there is nothing in the *Vita* by Venantius Fortunatus which matches the scene. But this is to ignore the rather wider range of material about St Radegonde which was available. A reading of these sources suggests that the image might well be one which pertains to Radegonde's life. If one accepts the view that all of the subjects are male, it could well be seen to represent Clothair and his sons. Like Henry II's family there were plenty of sons to fill out the portrait. Like Henry II's family they reputedly were very keen on hunting. Like Henry II's family, at least some of them were troublesome to their father; like Young Henry one of Clothair's sons Chram, who had pretended to royal power before his father's death, died in rebellion against him.²⁰

A more apposite possibility however has the most feminine looking person, Person 2, representing a young Radegonde. This possibility would fit either with a depiction of Clothair leading her and her brother (King of Thuringia after their father's death) into captivity, or with Radegonde in company with Kings Clothair and Theuderic, who fell out on the subject of who was to have custody of her. The former analysis seems particularly apt; on this approach the gesture towards the hawk could represent either her brother's forced resignation of power, or his longing for freedom. As for Radegonde's masculine dress, her biography says that being educated in part in the German style she learned to hunt at the gallop ("like a man"²¹); a story which might be visually conveyed by giving her at least a semblance of male clothing while hunting. Radegonde's youth (she was only around ten years old when taken prisoner by Clothair) might also account for her portrayal with uncovered hair and unfeminine dress.

Such a portrayal would also fit as part of a series of pictures, for example: Radegonde being brought into captivity, another of her seeking advice from St John, and another of her presenting him with the gift. It is notable that another church in Chinon (Saint-Etienne) has a depiction of Radegonde's visit to St John in stained glass, albeit of a much later date. Further just such scenes were included in the chapel at a later date, and are noted by Heron.

On this basis it is suggested that the Radegonde Mural should most safely be considered not as a depiction of the Plantagenet family, but as one of part of St Radegonde's life, and that the figures are read as follows:

Person 1: King Clothair

Person 2: St Radegonde (as a young girl)

Person 3: Radegonde's brother (rightful King of Thuringia)

²⁰ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks* (transl. M. Dalton), Oxford 1927, VII, ed Fouracre, New Cambridge Medieval History Vol 1 (reprint Cambridge 2015) p 201

²¹ Fleury, E, *Histoire de Sainte-Radegonde* (Paris 1847) p 20 quoting Thierry A *Recits des Temps Merovingiens* (Paris 1840) vol 2 p 246

Persons 4 and 5: Unclear, but likely the remaining relations of Radegonde, Amalfrid and (possibly) Vitiges who escaped captivity and were taken to Constantinople by Belisarius²².

This approach does not negative a Plantagenet connection however: the timing of the fresco and its apparent association with the extension to the chapel, suggest that a Plantagenet hand was involved. Further one should not neglect the decision to introduce an association between St Radegonde and the Plantagenet family. Such a decision seems unlikely for Henry II himself. But either Eleanor of Aquitaine or Richard I, familiar with her veneration at Poitiers, might well have been responsible. Interestingly Richard arrived in England after his accession as King of England, on the saint's feast day, which might be attributable to a devotion to the saint.²³ As for Eleanor, a spike in the number of churches devoted to St Radegonde in England correlates with Eleanor's tenure as Queen and Dowager Queen, suggesting that she did herself have a devotion to the saint.²⁴ Further for either the resonance of the escape from imprisonment which Radegonde's story gives would be a meaningful reference. Eleanor's release from captivity would have resonance for them both; and in his last years Richard had his own liberation narrative.

II. THE FECAMP PSALTER

Where does this leave the Fécamp Psalter? In essence, the removal of the identification of the "Plantagenet cloaks" and the identification of the mural with the Plantagenets removes one significant limb of Jesus Viejo's argument.

However despite this loss, the identification of the Psalter with Eleanor of Aquitaine can, it is suggested, be demonstrated to be robust, albeit for slightly different reasons.

Viejo's argument identifying Eleanor as the patron of the Psalter rests on the following limbs:

- (a) Proximity to/family association with Fécamp, where the psalter was produced.
- (b) Iconographic links to Eleanor's life.
- (c) The Radegonde Mural link, in particular the "Plantagenet" cloak linings.
- (d) The presence of St Hilaire and St Radegonde in the calendar.
- (e) The coincidence of a single female patron in this and the Helmarshausen Psalter commissioned by or for Eleanor's daughter Matilda, wife of Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony and the verifiable meeting between the two at about the time of commissioning of the Psalter.

As has been indicated above, one limb of this, the Radegonde Mural link, should be jettisoned. It is argued below that the identification can still be made, but rests on the following evidential limbs:

- (a) The proximity/association links between the Plantagenets and Fécamp.

²² Edward Gibbon; *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. London 1880. p. 271; ed Esders, *East and West in the Early Middle Ages: The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective*, (CUP, Cambridge, 2019)Ch 1

²³ Nicholas Vincent has convincingly argued that a number of Henry II's channel crossings can be linked to saints' days: "The Court of Henry II" in ed Harper-Bill/Vincent *Henry II New Interpretations* (Boydell, Woodbridge, 2007)

²⁴ F Brittain, *The Lyfe of St Radegunde*, (CUP, Cambridge, 1926), xi

- (b) Eleanor's location and the link to Matilda and the Helmarshausen Psalter
- (c) Strong circumstantial evidence linking Eleanor to the Psalter. This consists of:
 - (i) Iconographic links to Eleanor's life;
 - (ii) The aptness of the donor depiction to be Eleanor;
 - (iii) Telling links in the saints commemorated in the Psalter;
 - (iv) A verifiable chain of custody linked by blood to Eleanor.

The Plantagenets and Fécamp

Viejo traces the long association between Fécamp and the Plantagenet dynasty in particular as the location of the pantheon of the early Dukes Richard of Normandy. While concrete evidence of the relationship between Henry II and the Abbey is slight there is material suggesting that it existed. A veneration for the Dukes interred there is found in the naming of Henry and Eleanor's third son Richard. Further Eleanor and Henry had attended an event commemorating the Dukes Richard at Fécamp in 1162²⁵. In addition recent research on Fécamp highlights both the recording of events relevant to Henry's life in the Abbey's documents, strongly suggesting further patronage and the fact that Henry's obit notice in the Abbey records identifies Eleanor as his wife – a slight anomaly given their serious estrangement for the final fifteen years of their marriage²⁶. The latter suggests the possibility of a cordial relationship between Eleanor and the Abbey.

The very richness of the Psalter also suggests strongly a link to the Plantagenets as the highest status likely patrons. The Psalter is self-evidently a work commissioned for an extremely wealthy and/or high status person. This can be seen in the sheer scale of the gilding – nearly all the backdrops are fully gilded. It is also apparent in the detail both in the full page illustrations for the calendar and the Holy story, but also in the Zodiac and bloodletting images within the Calendar. Viejo describes it as of a richness which is “seemingly unparalleled within Fécamp's contemporary and previous artistic production”.

There are also further subtle signs that (leaving aside the donor page, which will be considered separately later) it was commissioned for someone of the highest rank in the depictions of April and May. These are pictures which traditionally invoke nobles and hawking, but in this case they do so with the indicators of rank being noticeably greater than comparator depictions in, for example, the Hunterian Psalter, the Winchester Psalter and the St Albans Psalter. The April noble (Figure 5) is dressed with astonishing lavishness, with a cape lined with ermine (usually depicted on royalty) as well as a gown lined with vair (usually depicted only on higher nobles such as counts and dukes). He wears what appears to be a form of crown – a coronet possibly of acanthus leaves, or possibly a *tufa* of peacock feathers. Either would seem to symbolise a victorious general.²⁷ The *tufa* possibility is particularly suggestive as in 1186 the Pope would send a *tufa* to Eleanor's youngest son John

²⁵ Torigni, i, 336-7

²⁶ S. Lecouteaux “Réseaux de confraternité et histoire des bibliothèques : L'exemple de l'abbaye bénédictine de la Trinité de Fécamp” PhD University of Caen 2015

²⁷ P Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection* 3 part 1 (Dumbarton Oaks, 1973) pp 129-30.

for his victories in Ireland.²⁸ He holds a floriated sceptre or lily, representations of which are common on comital seals of this period. Eleanor of Aquitaine's own seal bears one which is very similar. Both of these features again point to a higher ranking noble. The hawking man of May also has a cape lined with ermine, suggesting quasi-royal status.

Figure 5: April (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KB 76 F 13, folium 004v)

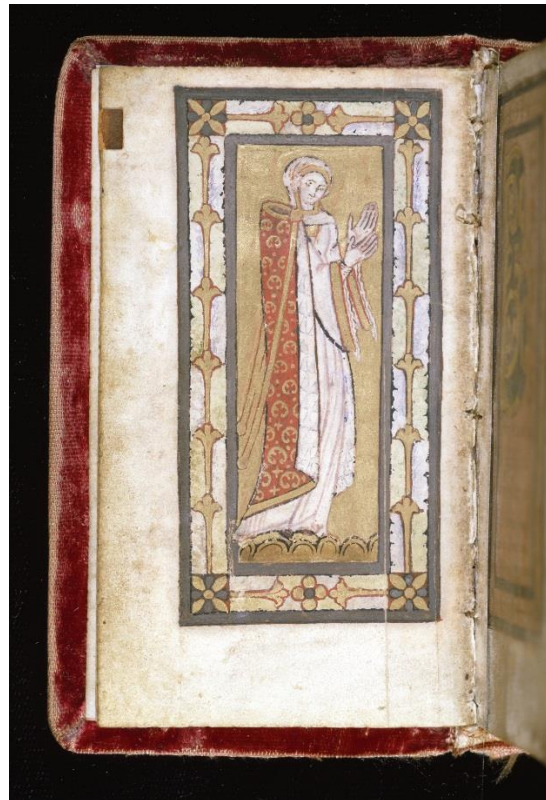


Eleanor's location and the link to Matilda and the Helmarshausen Psalter

Viejo notes the striking coincidence between the Fécamp Psalter and the Helmarshausen Psalter commissioned by or for Eleanor's daughter Matilda around the time of her return to Germany from temporary exile in the mid-1180s. They are the only two surviving examples of psalters with an individual female portrait flanking the Beatus page (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Donor portraits Eleanor Psalter and Helmarshausen Psalter (KB 76 F 13, folium 028v and Walters Art Museum W106v)

²⁸ Howden *Gesta Regis Henrici: the Chronicle of the reigns of Henry II and Richard I, A.D. 1169-1192*, trans Stubbs (London 1867), i 339; ed. Smith *The Cambridge History of Ireland: Volume 1, 600-1550* (CUP, Cambridge, 2018) p 195



That coincidence seems less likely to be just that when it is borne in mind that Matilda had visited England between June 1184 and early 1185 and for most of her residence there she seems to have been in company with her mother. It is certain that she gave birth to her last son William in July 1184 at Winchester, where Eleanor was then residing and that from that period there are within the Pipe Rolls both traces of Matilda travelling with Eleanor (to Eleanor's dower manor of Berkhamstead and later to London) and the absence of independent traces of Eleanor in a different location. In spring 1185 Eleanor is again spotted in the Pipe Rolls being accounted for with Matilda and her family at Portsmouth and then Porchester prior to travelling to Normandy. From then until spring of 1186 the royal family seems to have been in and around Normandy with some stays close to Fécamp, particularly in and around Rouen.²⁹

In short, not only were Eleanor and Matilda together for a protracted spell in the relevant period, but Eleanor can be proved to have been within a convenient distance of Fécamp at around the time of the Psalter's being commissioned. Further if Eleanor is the patron of the Fécamp Psalter, the fact that both this and the Helmarshausen Psalter boast female donor portraits makes perfect sense.

Iconographic links to Eleanor's life

Viejo identifies a number of iconographic links. In particular he posits a connection between the story of David and the patron, because of the juxtaposition of the images of the patron on the facing page and David within the Beatus page itself. This seems over-optimistic given that the Beatus pages come immediately before the start of the Psalms, which are necessarily

²⁹ I am indebted to the as yet unpublished *Itinerary of Henry II* prepared by Prof Nicholas Vincent and Dr Judith Everard.

associated with David. It was therefore far from uncommon to illustrate this page with images of David – the Hunterian Psalter does likewise, with an image of King David tuning his harp opposite to the Beatus initial, as does the St Albans Psalter. However his further suggestion that one of the images of David chosen may have a personal resonance seems possible – other psalters may chose David writing or singing, but the choice of the second image of David combating Goliath, in the lower part of the B seems unique. It also has resonance, either via the history of the Dukes of Normandy, which featured young Dukes combating great odds and mighty enemies (Duke Richard I and William the Bastard/Conqueror – and even Henry in his youth combating King Stephen) or by the parallel which has been drawn of Henry II as a new Saul with Eleanor’s rebellious sons the parallel for David.³⁰

To this might perhaps be added the strong Byzantine influence which Viejo notes in the portrayal of the Virgin enthroned on fol 18r, and also in the striking diptych effect between that representation and the three Wise Men. This can be noted in contrast to Psalters of a similar vintage such as the Hunterian Psalter or the Winchester Psalter. The impression is very strongly of emphasis on female power; it may be simply (as Viejo posits) because of a veneration of the Virgin by the patron. But it might also be because of the patron’s history or experience of power being wielded by a woman. If Eleanor is the patron, all of these resonances would be in operation; as too would a Byzantine link, since she had visited Constantinople as a crusader, and appears to have received at least one book from its Emperor, Manuel Comnenus, after her marriage to Henry.³¹

The Donor page

As Viejo notes, the donor page opposite the Beatus page (Figure 6) is indicative of a very high status female donor, in that there is a representation of a silk veil, a necklace with a heavy gold pendant and a belt with gold decoration.

However a little more than this can be taken from the page. The cape is again lined with vair, and appears to be edged with silk or satin, judging by the sheen depicted near the lady’s feet. Those feet are shod in patterned leather shoes. All of this is a confirmation of the rich dress he notes and entirely of a piece with the status of the April/May gentlemen.

But rather more particularly, the hair of the donor appears to be grey; while the veil may be argued to give that impression, the knot of hair which appears at the back of the donor’s head, appears not to be covered by the veil, and seems to be grey. Further in the Helmarshausen Psalter Matilda is likewise veiled, but the colour of her hair as a golden-brown can be clearly discerned, both at the front and under the veil. This grey haired lady patron is entirely

³⁰ A further parallel was drawn by John of Salisbury comparing Henry to Saul with Becket playing David: *Letters of John of Salisbury Vol 2: Volume II: The Later Letters* (1163-1180) (trans. Butler, Millor, and Brooke) (OUP, Oxford, 1979) letters 168, 174

³¹ Van Houts p 99 “Les Femmes dans Le Royaume Plantagenet” in ed Aurell *Plantagenets et Capetians: Confrontations et Heritages* (Turnhout 2006). Although Monica Green has suggested that the preface in which this is contained is not genuine (in M.H. Green *Women’s Healthcare in the Medieval West Texts and Contexts* (Aldershot 2000) no VIII Appendix p 9), Van Houts recreation from contemporaneous materials of the basis for the attribution is compelling.

consistent with the picture being a portrait of Eleanor: she was at this point in her early sixties.

The two other verified depictions of Eleanor also have some support to give to such an identification. The window in Poitiers Cathedral commissioned by Eleanor and Henry prior to her imprisonment and containing portraits of them as donors, depicts Eleanor in blue and with a similar cloak about her shoulders. It also, apparently deliberately, depicts her as a woman in her middle years – the lines on her face are evident. Finally the tomb image which it is believed Eleanor herself commissioned, while apparently portraying Eleanor at an age in her prime, depicts a woman with a very similar facial shape and lines of nose and brows to the donor. Both show a long straight nose³² and a mouth set quite high above a full rounded chin. There is also a resemblance in the jewellery – a plain round pendant on a thin chain or band, sitting above the neck of the gown. Finally there is a striking resemblance between the belt in the portrait and the belt on the effigy: a buckled belt with thick golden cross bands.

Links to the saints

Jesus Viejo rests his argument on only three links to saints: the inclusion of St Radegonde's own feast day and that of St Hilaire, the patron saint of Poitiers as well as that of St Thomas Becket, who was adopted by the Plantagenet family.

Interestingly the Psalter also includes the saint's day of Bernard of Clairvaux, with whom Eleanor had had much contact during her youth, both via his intervention in aid of her father's reconciliation with the Church in the early 1130s and in her early years of marriage to Louis VII, when she sought his help in her marriage, and corresponded with him.³³ Although his presence is consistent with Eleanor's ownership/patronage and this places the Psalter after his canonisation in 1174, Bernard was such an international figure at his death that no special reliance on this entry would be prudent. However there are four further telling links.

The first two concern the other major cities in Eleanor's territories; if this psalter was hers, surely one would expect to find the saints of those cities noted. That is indeed exactly what we do find. So the first link not noted by Viejo is the inclusion on 30 June of the feast of Saint Martial of Limoges. Saint Martial's shrine was a major religious centre within Eleanor's lands. Louis VII celebrated the festival there prior to marrying Eleanor.³⁴ Eleanor herself organised the investiture of her son Richard to be held in part at Limoges; and Henry the Young King left orders for his eyes, brain and intestines to be buried there.³⁵

The second link is then the inclusion on 10 December of the feast day of St André, the patron saint of Bordeaux, the leading city of the Aquitanian portion of her lands, where her first marriage to Louis VII took place.

There are then two further highly significant links to Eleanor's hometown and own interests. The first of these is the inclusion on 10 August of the feast of St Laurence, the patron saint of

³² It is not correct to say that the nose is formulaic – compare the nose of Henry in the Poitiers window, the weeding gardener in the Fécamp psalter in July, or the shorter nose of the April noble.

³³ Letter at: <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1294.html>

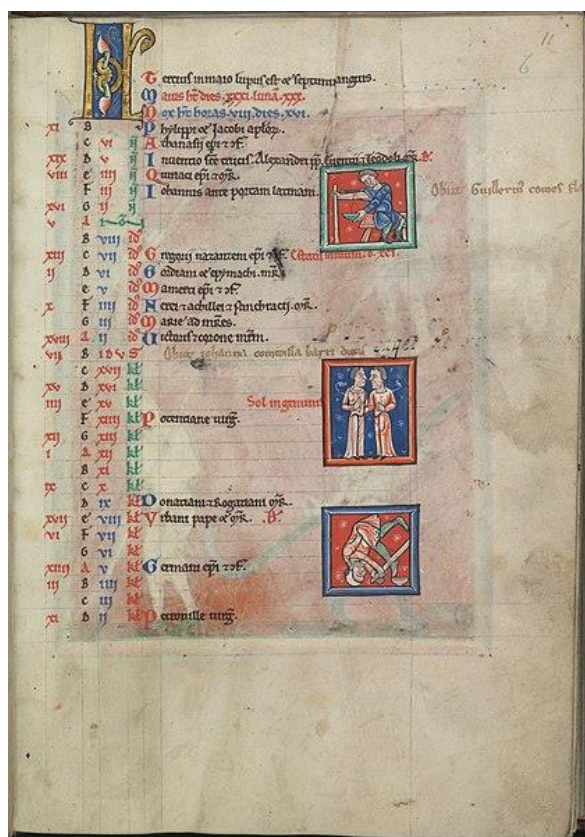
³⁴ Pacaut *Louis VII et son Royaume* (Paris 1964) p. 31

³⁵ *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, XII (Paris 1869) pp. 337-40, 442-5

librarians. St Laurence was venerated in Poitiers, including in the Cathedral, where some relics were held and where one of the three windows commissioned by Eleanor and Henry features the life of the saint.³⁶ Eleanor of Aquitaine also founded a chapel in his honour at Fontevraud in her retirement there.³⁷

The final, and probably the single most unequivocal link is the inclusion on 13 May of "Marie ad mures" (Figure 7). There is no such saint. However the church where St Radegonde is buried was formerly the church of St Marie-hors-les-Murs, and 13 May is the feast day of St Agnes of Poitiers, which was celebrated at that church.³⁸ This is therefore a festival which points definitively to a person with a very close association with Poitiers. Only such a person, it is suggested, would celebrate this feast. It does not appear in the Hunterian or Winchester psalters.

Figure 7: KB 76 F 13, folium 006r



The psalter therefore commemorates the patron saints of all the major cities of Eleanor's Duchy, as well as two other saints with whose observance we know her to have been familiar and who had a particular resonance for a native of Poitiers. This portfolio of saints itself strongly suggests a link with Eleanor.

³⁶ The most celebrated window is the Crucifixion window, in which Eleanor and Henry are pictured as donors. The right hand window features the lives of St Peter and St Paul. The left hand window is devoted to the life of St Laurence.

³⁷ Marchegay, "Chartes de Fontevraud concernant l'Aunis et La Rochelle" *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* (Paris 1858) pp 339-40

³⁸ Favreau *Poitiers Sainte-Radegonde* (Poitiers 1999) p 28

It should however be noted that there are some anomalies in the psalter. One might, for example, expect the other feast days of St Radegonde (celebrated only in Poitiers) to feature, which they do not. There is also no sign of the feast of St Valerie, the secondary saint of Limoges whose hagiography was apparently commissioned by Eleanor.³⁹ As for the secondary feasts of St Radegonde, this might reflect a need to commemorate more significant saints across the broader Plantagenet Empire. It is also possible that Eleanor's long residence in England, where St Radegonde's feast was held on an entirely different day⁴⁰, influenced this. As for St Valerie, her absence could reflect real doubts on Eleanor's part as to the veracity of the saint's (somewhat incredible) story, or have a political dimension, given that at the time when the psalter was commissioned, the city of Limoges had been notably intransigent in its dealings with the Plantagenets, including with Eleanor's son Richard.

The Chain of Custody

The website for the Koninklijke Bibliotheek records the following: "the psalter turns up in the frontier region between Hainaut and Flanders. Additions to the calendar attest to this. They include the anniversaries of Johanna of Constantinople, countess of Flanders and Hainaut († 1244), of William of Dampierre († 1231), his daughter Joanna, countess of Bar († 1246), his son William, count of Flanders († 1251) (Figure 7 above), his son John, lord of Dampierre († 1258) and his daughter-in-law Machteld of Béthune († 1263). Also included are the anniversaries of a bishop of Tournai, an abbot of Anchin, a provost of Mons and a scholaster of Cambrai."

This is quite true, but it fails to contextualise these names. Viejo simply hypothesises an *ex voto* offering of the psalter to the Church after Eleanor's death. In fact the names recorded are very telling. There appear to be at least two series of obit notices, one earlier and one or two later. It is the earlier set which records the names above and which gives a link to Eleanor of Aquitaine.

"Johanna of Constantinople" was Eleanor of Aquitaine's great granddaughter, via her first child, Marie of France, Countess of Champagne. Following the untimely death of her mother, Marie of Champagne, in the East -where she had travelled to take up her role as Empress of Constantinople - Johanna (or Jeanne) and her sister Margaret were raised at the French Court alongside Blanche of Castile⁴¹. It appears likely that the widowed Elizabeth of Bruges (whose obit is recorded in the Psalter) had charge of their household and therefore became close to the orphan girls.

Johanna/Jeanne was the Countess of Flanders and Hainault in her own right. Her obit was probably recorded on the instructions of her sister Margaret, who succeeded her as Countess of Flanders and Hainault in 1244. There is powerful evidence to suggest that she had custody of the psalter. William of Dampierre was Margaret's second husband. William of Flanders, Joanna of Bar and John of Dampierre were Margaret's children. Machteld of Bethune was her daughter in law. Nor are the names recorded above the only links to Eleanor's family.

³⁹ Richard *Histoire des Comtes de Poitou* (Paris 1903) Vol II p 151-2

⁴⁰ F Brittain *The Lyfe of Saint Radegunde* xi

⁴¹ L Grant, *Blanche of Castile: Queen of France* (Yale, 2016) p 42

There is also a record of the death of one Jean d'Avesnes, a son of Margaret by her first marriage (to Bouchard D'Avesnes), further reinforcing the case for Margaret's custody.

The picture which one can thus trace is of a psalter which was handed down in the female line. Although we have its custody only from the time it was with Jeanne of Constantinople, if it came to her via the female line, it would have come from Eleanor either to her daughter Marie of France or to Marie's daughter, Jeanne's mother, Marie of Champagne.

Thus a logical chain of custody from Eleanor to those who demonstrably held it can be posited. Although no contact between Eleanor and her eldest daughter has ever been proved it is far from impossible. Various possible dates have been posited.⁴² Certainly Eleanor became intimate with her granddaughter via her second daughter Alice of France, Countess of Blois, in her last years.⁴³ And in the 1190s (up until Marie's death in 1198) both she and Marie of France were widows *sui juris* with the ability to meet at will.

The hypothesised line of transfer does not just make sense of the first set of obit notices. It would also support just such a transfer into Church custody as in fact occurred: from Margaret it should have passed to her daughter Joanna of Bar, but she pre-deceased her mother. But it appears likely that Margaret's youngest daughter Marie, who became Abbess of Flines was still alive on her mother's death in 1280. On Marie's death without children (in 1302) however it would naturally pass into the Church. That later transfer would support both its extensive later church obits, and its later custody in the mid-fourteenth century by Gerard de Dainville.

Conclusion on the Psalter

Each of the above elements points in favour of Eleanor of Aquitaine as the patron who commissioned and is represented in the Fécamp Psalter. Indeed the first items alone, it is suggested, strongly indicate this conclusion. However when one adds the powerful evidence of the final two elements, the saints and the chain of custody, the case for Eleanor of Aquitaine as the patron of and first owner of the Psalter becomes compelling. Its new attribution as "the Eleanor Psalter" should be regarded as robust.

A further aspect

One further aspect of the Psalter which should not be neglected is the fact that it contains in each month of the calendar at least two detailed and carefully illustrated miniatures of bloodletting (see Figure 7, 8). These appear to be absolutely unique in the surviving psalters of this period. The commissioning of a psalter with this feature raises a strong presumption that the patron was herself interested in bloodletting.

Figure 8:

⁴² J. McCash, "Marie Champagne and Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Relationship Re-examined," *Speculum* 54 (1979), 698–711

⁴³ Indeed one charter by Eleanor is a gift to this granddaughter, calling her "dearest ward"



How does this fit in with the conclusion above, that the patron is Eleanor of Aquitaine? The answer is that while there is no positive evidence linking her with an interest in bloodletting, the surviving evidence is certainly not inconsistent with such an interest, and might be said to be broadly supportive of it.

The first indication in its favour is Eleanor's apparent interest in things medical, evidenced by the sending to her of a book of women's medicine by Manuel Comnenus, referred to above. It appears that an interest in regular bloodletting was a developing science at the time. Peter the Venerable is recorded corresponding with his doctor on the subject of the advisability of maintaining his regular programme of bloodletting while suffering from an illness.⁴⁴ Such an interest would therefore be not unexpected from someone who was the possessor of a detailed book on medical matters.

The second indication in its favour is that two of Eleanor's verified correspondents were themselves enthusiasts for bloodletting. The first, of course, was Manuel Comnenus himself. He supplemented a passionate interest in medical matters generally (he personally treated the Emperor Conrad for the injuries he sustained at the battle of Dorylaeum) with a detailed knowledge of the practice of bloodletting. Indeed he would himself act as phlebotomist.⁴⁵

The second enthusiast and correspondent is Hildegard of Bingen. There is a surviving letter from her to Eleanor.⁴⁶ That letter itself appears to deal more with emotional than physical difficulties, but it does establish that the two women were in contact. Hildegard herself was a strong advocate for the benefits of bloodletting: Hildegard addressed the three techniques of phlebotomy, cupping, and scarification at length in her *Causes and Cures*.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

The evidence therefore supports the acceptance of the Fécamp Psalter as a commission by Eleanor of Aquitaine in mid-1185-early 1186 and as featuring a portrait of her as its patron.

That attribution itself feeds into the body of evidence relating to the Radegonde Mural. While the evidence here does not support the thesis that the Radegonde Mural features a picture of

⁴⁴ Ed. B. Rosenwein, *Reading the Middle Ages, Volume II: Sources from Europe, Byzantium, and the Islamic World, c. 900 to c. 1500* (UTP, Toronto, 2013) pp 362-4

⁴⁵ P Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143-1180* (CUP, Cambridge, 1993) pp 362-3

⁴⁶ <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1187.html>

⁴⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *On Natural Philosophy* trans Berger (New York 1999); Strehlow, Hertzka *Hildegard of Bingen's medicine* (Vermont 1999) p 122

Eleanor, the evidence of its date, taken with Eleanor's background as a child in Poitiers, the major centre of the saint's cult, her apparent fostering of that cult in England and her references to two Radegonde related festivals in the Psalter does suggest that she should be regarded as the most likely candidate for the commissioning of both the construction of the chapel at Chinon and the painting of the Radegonde mural. As for its content, the better view is that Eleanor chose to illustrate a series of scenes from the life of St Radegonde, of which only one now survives.

Both representations therefore stand as highly significant entries in the very limited roster of items verifiably associated with Eleanor of Aquitaine in her life.