

67.08 Selected transcriptions, John, 1199–1216, relating to Joan of Sicily

Joan Queen of Sicily

3727E

'Alienor Dei gratia illustris regina Anglie ducissa Normannie et Aquitanie comitissa Andegavie omnibus ad quos presens scriptum peruenerit salutem. Uniuersitati vestre facimus notum nos in Gasconiam iter arripuisse et cartam in qua continetur testamentum karissime filie nostre regine Iohanne nobiscum detulisse ut ea visa propter testimonium vi. sigillorum in ea pendentium comes de Sancto Egidio quod ad eum pertinet de elemosina faciat assignari. Vobis igitur complacere quatinus testamentum prefate regine sicut in carta continetur cuius transcriptum vobis transmittimus coram domino Willelmo priore Fontisebraldi et fratribus cum eo in Anglia hac de causa applicatis pro amore Dei et nostro ad honorem Dei et anime eius utilitatem assignari faciatis.'

Pd (calendar from A) Round Calendar no 1105.

A = Angers AD Maine-et-Loire 101H55 piece non coté, forming the conclusion to a copy of the will of Queen Joan. Originally sealed by Eleanor. B = Paris BN ms nouc.acq.Latin 1245 fo.141r, copy of A, s.xix.

1199 Queen Joan of Sicily's Will, John, (part in 48)

[Testament of the queen Joan of Sicily (Planatagenet), leaving large sums to various religious establishments, mainly in France, including money to pay off the Abbess of Fontevrault's debts. It is thought that Joan's will financed the massive, and otherwise inexplicable, expansion and enhancement of La Grava at the beginning of the 13th century; this was not paid for by the Crown and the Abbess was in debt.]

'She leaves to the abbey of Fontevrault her body, 900 marcs (£600), to pay the debts of the abbess; towards the building of the houses of the brethren of St John the evangelist at Fontevrault ... The residue of those 3,000 marcs (£2,000) which the king her brother (*John*) owes her she places at the disposal of the lord of Canterbury, the lord of York, her brother, and the queen her mother, and the abbot of Torpenai and the prior of Fontevrault, to be divided, according to their information, among religious houses and the poor, for her soul.'

[There was a significant residue; although there was no direct mention of La Grava, this was the only principal house of that order in England; the other, Amesbury, had not only been lavishly rebuilt and expanded by the Crown, but had no canons at this time. There is no record of their decision.]

[Letter of Alienor, the illustrious queen of England, duchess of Normandy and Aquitaine, countess of Anjou to her vassals.]

'She has gone to Gascony, taking with her the original of the testament of her dearest daughter queen Joan, that the count of St Gilles may see it, for the testimony of the six seals attached to it, and provide its alms as far as he is concerned. She begs them, therefore, to carry out its provisions, according to the transcript she sends them, in the presence of William prior of Fontevrault and the brethren who have come with him to England on this matter, as they love God and her, to the honour of God and the advantage of the queen's soul.'

[While King John gave his dying sister the cash for her bequests, it was her mother Queen Eleanor who administered it, together with top clerics, presumably for any monies coming to England; 'this matter' is likely to be the prior of Fontevault travelling to England to carry out Joan's bequest to an English Fontevraudine house – the obvious candidate being St John de la Grava in Leighton. While there must have been much political wrangling about the distribution of such a large sum, doubtless Canterbury and York would have been keen for the English church to benefit, and why else would the bargaining have taken place in England? The male section of Fontevault was dedicated to St John, the female to St Mary. Joan, an English Plantagenet princess, had many strong associations with Fontevault, dying there tragically, having been made a nun of the order on her deathbed.]

Round, J H (ed), 1899. *Calendar of Documents Preserved in France Vol 1, 918-1206*, 392-3

Commenting on this document Judith Everard wrote (pers comm)

It is unlikely that Joanna would have had any interests in England, whether financial or personal. Several of the bequests are for the benefit of Fontevraud, and it is possible that Fontevraud might have decided to spend some of the more general bequests on its English priories. In particular, Joanna bequeathed 300 marcs to all the convents of Fontevraud except the chief house (300 marcs each, or divided between them?).

The testament ends with instructions on the disposition of the balance of a debt of 3000 marcs owed to Joanna by her brother the king. We know nothing of the circumstances of this loan.

Prima facie, there is nothing to indicate that the religious houses and the poor should be in England. But it is possible that Fontevraud was one of the chosen beneficiaries and Fontevraud's English priories in particular.

The connection with England only appears from the text added by Eleanor. This explains that Eleanor herself was travelling to Gascony to administer the testamentary bequests there. It is not addressed to anyone in particular, but to whomsoever shall read this copy of the testament. It orders them to carry out its provisions, in the presence of William, prior of Fontevraud, and his brethren who are in England in this matter. Evidently, then, the persons to whom this was addressed were expected to be in England, and it further implies that there were in fact bequests to be executed in England.

One possible interpretation is that the addressees were to render to Fontevraud as much as was its due under the testament of royal revenues and lands in England, and Prior William was there to make sure they did so. This is supported by the fact that this document was preserved in the archives of Fontevraud. But on the other hand Eleanor does not specify that the testamentary bequests are to be executed in England only for the benefit of Fontevraud, and Prior William's role might have been as royal agent supervising the execution of the testament in general in England.