Clotilda Encyclopedia Article

Clotilda

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Contents

Clotilda Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Clotilda.....3

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CLOTILDA (c. 470–545), queen consort of Clovis, king of the Franks. Her Christian faith of the Nicene, or catholic, tradition greatly influenced her husband and all of northern Gaul. Clotilda was born a Bergundian, in the Rhone valley in eastern France; her grandfather was Gundioc, king of the Bergundians. Her father, Chilperic, a Christian, was one of four heirs to the king. A violent dispute among the heirs led to Chilperic's death and to Clotilda's having to live with an uncle in Geneva. Commerce between the Bergundians in Geneva and the Salians, a group of Franks living in Paris under King Clovis, led to Clotilda's meeting Clovis and to their eventual marriage.

Clotilda was a Christian devoted to the orthodox faith, as opposed to Arianism. Clovis disdained her faith until the Alemanni, a formidable Germanic people, invaded northern Gaul. He vowed that if he defeated the Alemanni he would accept Clotilda's Christ. His victory in 495 led to his baptism, along with that of three thousand of his warriors, on Christmas Day of 496. The Franks were the first Germanic tribes to convert to the orthodox faith; most of the tribes to the south of them were Arians. With Clotilda's help, Clovis expanded the area of his rule, defended the Catholic faith against Arianism, and became an important link in the spread of Christianity in northwestern Europe.

After the death of her husband in 511, Clotilda's four sons engaged in a bitter feud that led to several deaths. Deeply saddened, Clotilda retired to a convent in Tours, a town where the famous Martin had been bishop in the fourth century. She maintained her keen interest in civic matters and became fabled for her piety and her practical deeds of generosity.

Bibliography

The best biography, and one that is quite readable, is Godefroi Kurth's *Saint Clotilda*, translated by V. M. Crawford (London and New York, 1913).