

# Childeric I

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**Childeric I** (c. 440 – 481/82) was a Merovingian king of the Salian Franks and the father of Clovis I, who would unite the Franks and found the Merovingian dynasty.

## Contents

- 1 Career
- 2 Marriage, children, and death
- 3 Tomb
- 4 Notes
- 5 References
- 6 External links

## Career

Childeric succeeded his father Merovech as king of the Salian Franks, traditionally in 457 or 458. With his Frankish warband he established his capital at Tournai, on lands he had received as a *foederatus* of the Romans, and for some time he kept the peace with his allies.

In 463 Childeric fought in conjunction with the Roman General Aegidius, the *magister militum* of northern Gaul based in Soissons, to defeat the Visigoths, who had hoped to extend their dominion along the banks of the Loire River. After the death of Aegidius, Childeric assisted *Comes* ("count") Paul of Angers, together with a mixed band of Gallo-Romans and Franks, in defeating the Goths and taking booty. Saxon raiders under the command of a certain *Adovacrius* (perhaps but not surely Odoacer) reached Angers, but Childeric arrived the next day and a battle ensued. Count Paul was killed and Childeric took the city. Childeric, having delivered Angers, followed a Saxon warband to the islands on the Atlantic mouth of the Loire, and massacred them there. In a change of alliances, he joined forces with Odoacer, according to Gregory of Tours, to stop a band of the Alamanni who wished to invade Italy.

## Marriage, children, and death

Gregory of Tours, in *Libri Historiarum* (Book ii.12), records the story of the expulsion of Childeric by the Salian Franks for seducing their wives. He was exiled for eight years in Thuringia with King Basin and his wife,

### Childeric I



Signet ring of Childeric I. Inscription CHILDIRICI REGIS ("of Childeric the king").<sup>[1]</sup> Found in his tomb at Tournai, now in the Monnaie de Paris

### King of the Salian Franks

<b>Reign</b>	457–481/82
<b>Predecessor</b>	Merovech
<b>Successor</b>	Clovis I
<b>Spouse</b>	Basina of Thuringia
<b>Issue</b>	Clovis I Audoflède, Queen of the Ostrogoths Lanthilde Alboflède
<b>Dynasty</b>	Merovingian
<b>Father</b>	Merovech
<b>Born</b>	c. 440
<b>Died</b>	481/82 Tournai
<b>Burial</b>	Tournai

Queen Basina. He returned only when a faithful servant advised him that he could safely do so by sending him half of a gold piece that Childeric had split with him before his exile. The book also describes his arrival in Tournai with Basina, who had left her husband to be with him.

Childeric married Basina and they had the following children:

1. Clovis I (466 – 511).
2. Audofleda (467 – 511), Queen of the Ostrogoths, wife of Theodoric the Great.
3. Lanthilde (468 – *ii*??).
4. Aboflede (470 – *ii*??).

Childeric died in 481 and was buried in Tournai. His son Clovis succeeded him as king of the Salian Franks.

## Tomb

Childeric's tomb was discovered on 27 May 1653 by a mason doing repairs in the church of Saint-Brice in Tournai, Belgium. Numerous precious objects were found, including a richly ornamented sword, a torse-like bracelet, jewels of gold and garnet cloisonné, gold coins, a gold bull's head, and a ring with the inscription *CHILDERICI REGIS* ("of Childeric the king"), which identified the tomb. Some 300 golden bees were also found. Archduke Leopold William, governor of the Southern Netherlands (today's Belgium), had the find published in Latin. The treasure went first to the Habsburgs in Vienna, then as a gift to Louis XIV, who was not impressed with the treasure and stored it in the royal library, which became the Bibliothèque Nationale de France during the Revolution. Napoleon was more impressed with Childeric's bees and when he was looking for a heraldic symbol to trump the Bourbon fleur-de-lys, he settled on Childeric's bees as symbols of the French Empire.

On the night of November 5–6, 1831, the treasure of Childeric was among 80 kilos of treasure stolen from the Library and melted down for the gold. A few pieces were retrieved from where they had been hidden in the Seine, including two of the bees. The record of the treasure, however, now exists only in the fine engravings made at the time of its discovery and in some reproductions made for the Habsburgs.

## Notes

1. ^ G. Salaün, A. McGregor & P. Périn, "Empreintes inédites de l'anneau sigillaire de Childéric Ier : état des connaissances", *Antiquités Nationales*, 39 (2008), pp. 217-224 (esp. 218).

## References

- Edward James: *The Franks*. Oxford, 1988.



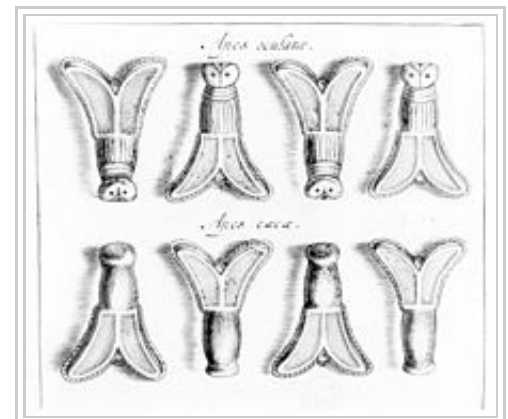
The church of Saint-Brice at Tournai (Belgium), where Childeric's tomb was discovered in 1653, as it looks today



Detail of golden bees with garnet insets

## External links

- Photo: ([http://books.google.com/books?id=15NCjWEcG\\_YC&pg=PA83](http://books.google.com/books?id=15NCjWEcG_YC&pg=PA83)) Merovingian sword and scabbard mounts from the tomb of King Childeric featuring silver-gilt and cloisonné garnets
- "A note on Childeric's bees" (<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/hydrionoframes/bees.html>): the discovery of his tomb: follow the links for the engravings of Childeric's treasure and the two remaining gold bees.



Detailed drawing of the golden bees/flyes discovered in the tomb of Childeric I in Tournai on 27 May 1653. Drawn by J. J. Chifflet in 1655.

<b>Childeric I</b> <b>Merovingian dynasty</b> <b>Born:</b> 437 <b>Died:</b> 481		
Preceded by <b>Merovech</b>	<b>King of the Salian Franks</b> 457–481	Succeeded by <b>Clovis I</b>

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