

Judith of Flanders

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Judith of Flanders (or **Judith of France**) (c. 843 – c. 870)^[1] was the eldest daughter of the Frankish King and Holy Roman Emperor Charles the Bald and his wife Ermentrude of Orléans. Through her marriages to two Kings of Wessex, Æthelwulf and Æthelbald, she was twice a queen. Her first two marriages were childless, but through her third marriage to Baldwin, she became the first Countess of Flanders and an ancestress of later Counts of Flanders. One of her sons by Baldwin married Ælfthryth, a daughter of Æthelbald's brother, Alfred the Great. She was also an ancestress of Matilda of Flanders, the consort of William the Conqueror, and thus of later monarchs of England.

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Queen of Wessex

In 855 King Æthelwulf of Wessex made a pilgrimage to Rome, and on his way back in 856 he stayed at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles the Bald. In July Æthelwulf became engaged to Charles's daughter, Judith, who was no more than fourteen, while Æthelwulf was about fifty years old, and on 1 October 856 they were married at Verberie in northern France. The marriage was a diplomatic alliance. Both men were suffering from Viking attacks, and for Æthelwulf the marriage had the advantage of associating him with Carolingian prestige. In Wessex it was not customary for kings' wives to be queens, but Charles insisted that his daughter be crowned queen.^{[2][3]}

The marriage provoked a rebellion by Æthelwulf's eldest surviving son, Æthelbald, probably because he feared displacement by a higher born half brother. However father and son negotiated a compromise under which Æthelwulf

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Judith and her third husband Baldwin.

Queen consort of Wessex

Tenure 1 October 856 – 13 January 858 (*1st Time*)
858–860 (*2nd Time*)

Predecessor Osburh

Successor Wulfthryth; then Ealhswith

Countess of Flanders

Tenure 13 December 862 – 879

Predecessor No Previous

Successor Ælfthryth of Wessex

Spouse Æthelwulf, King of Wessex
Æthelbald, King of Wessex
Baldwin I of Flanders

Issue

Baldwin II
Charles
Raoul

House Carolingian

Father Charles the Bald

Mother Ermentrude of Orléans

Born c. 843

received the eastern districts of the kingdom and Æthelbald the western. It is not known whether this meant that Æthelwulf took Kent and Æthelbald Wessex, or whether Wessex itself was divided.^[2]

Died	after 870
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Judith had no children by Æthelwulf, who died on 13 January 858. He was succeeded by Æthelbald, who married Judith, his step-mother, probably to enhance his status because she was the daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor.^[2] The marriage was condemned by Asser in his *Life of Alfred the Great*:

Once King Æthelwulf was dead, Æthelbald, his son, against God's prohibition and Christian dignity, and also contrary to the practice of all pagans, took over his father's marriage-bed and married Judith, daughter of Charles, king of the Franks, incurring great disgrace from all who heard of it.^[4]

Judith was still childless when Æthelbald died in 860 after a reign of two and a half years,^[4]

Elopement with Baldwin of Flanders

Following Æthelbald's death, Judith sold her properties in Wessex and returned to France. According to the *Chronicle of St. Bertin*, her father sent her to the Monastery at Senlis, where she would remain "*under his protection and royal episcopal guardianship, with all the honour due to a queen, until such time as, if she could not remain chaste, she might marry in the way the apostle said, that is suitably and legally.*"^[5] Presumably, Charles may have intended to arrange another marriage for his daughter. However, around Christmas 861, Judith eloped with Baldwin, later Count of Flanders. The two were likely married at the monastery of Senlis at this time. The record of the incident in the *Annals* depicts Judith not as the passive victim of bride theft but as an active agent, eloping at the instigation of Baldwin and apparently with her brother Louis the Stammerer's consent.^[6]

Unsurprisingly, Judith's father was furious and ordered his bishops to excommunicate the couple. They later fled to the court of Judith's cousin Lothair II of Lotharingia for protection, before going to Pope Nicholas I to plead their case. The Pope took diplomatic action and asked Judith's father to accept the union as legally binding and welcome the young couple into his circle - which ultimately he did. The couple then returned to France and were officially married at Auxerre in 863.

Baldwin was given the land directly south of the Scheldt, i.e.: the Country of Flanders (albeit an area of smaller size than the county which existed in the High Middle Ages) to ward off Viking attacks. Although it is disputed among historians as to whether King Charles did this in the hope that Baldwin would be killed in the ensuing battles with the Vikings, Baldwin managed the situation remarkably well. Baldwin succeeded in quelling the Viking threat, expanded both his army and his territory quickly, and became a faithful supporter of King Charles. The March of Baldwin came to be known as the County of Flanders and would come to be one of the most powerful principalities of France. Judith was still living in 870.

Children

By her third husband, Baldwin I of Flanders, Judith's children included:

- Charles (born after 863 – died young) - ostensibly named for Judith's father, Charles the Bald
- Baldwin II - (c. 864/866 – 918). Succeeded his father as Count of Flanders. Married Ælfthryth, daughter

of Alfred the Great

- Raoul (*Rodulf*) - (c. 869 – 896). Became Count of Cambrai around 888, and was killed by Herbert I of Vermandois in 896

Ancestry

Notes

1. ^ Judith's date of birth is uncertain. Janet Nelson in her Online DNB article on Æthelwulf (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8921/39264?docPos=1>) dates it after 843, but the entry for Judith in *A Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain* states that she was around fourteen when she married Æthelwulf in 856. It is also not known when she died. Nelson gives the date as c. 870, but also says that if she was alive in the 890s she may have arranged her son Baldwin's marriage to a daughter of Alfred the Great.
2. ^ ^a ^b ^c Janet L. Nelson, *Æthelwulf*, Oxford Online Dictionary of National Biography, 2004 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8921/39264?docPos=1>)
3. ^ Williams et al., *A Biographical Dictionary of Dark Age Britain*
4. ^ ^a ^b Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge eds., *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life and Other Contemporary Sources*, Penguin 1983 (2004 reprint), p. 73
5. ^ Geary, Patrick J. *Women at the Beginning: Origin Myths from the Amazons to the Virgin Mary*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 52
6. ^ Geary, op. cit., p. 53

References and further reading

- Entry on Judith in "Women at the Beginning" by Patrick J. Geary on Google Books (<http://books.google.com/books?id=SP0sSi8iHK4C&pg=PA51&dq=judith+of+flanders&ei=2Us8SZjtHaeGzgTcoLmeBA#PPA52,M1>)
- Women in England in the Middle Ages By Jennifer C. Ward on Google Books (<http://books.google.com/books?id=mpOxVF58dIgC&pg=PA120&dq=coronation+queen+judith&ei=q048SenoBJPqyQS-0oHSBA>)
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