

Fredegund

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Fredegund (or **Fredegunda**) (Latin: *Fredegundis*; French: *Frédégonde*) (died 597) was the Queen consort of Chilperic I, the Merovingian Frankish king of Soissons.

All her wealth and power came to her through her association with Chilperic. Originally a servant of Chilperic's first wife Audovera, Fredegund won Chilperic's affection and persuaded him to put Audovera in a convent and divorce her. But Chilperic then put Fredegund aside and married Galswintha. Galswintha died the same year, probably strangled by Fredegund^[1](c. 568), who succeeded Galswintha as queen. Galswintha's sister, Brunhilda, however, began a feud which lasted more than 40 years.

Fredegund is said to have ordered the assassination of Sigebert I of Austrasia in 575 and also to have made attempts on the lives of Sigebert's son Childebert II, her brother-in-law Guntram, king of Burgundy, and Brunhilda.^[2]

After the mysterious assassination of Chilperic in 584 AD, Fredegund seized his riches and took refuge in the Notre Dame de Paris cathedral. Both she and her surviving son, Clothar II, were protected by Guntram until he died in 592.

Gregory of Tours depicts her as ruthlessly murderous and sadistically cruel; in his account, Fredegund perhaps has few rivals in monstrosity. Although she did not live to see it, her son's execution of Brunhilda bore the mark of Fredegund's hatred: Clothar II had the old queen, now in her sixties, stretched in agony upon the rack for three entire days, then watched her meet her death chained between four horses that were goaded to the four points of the compass, tearing her body asunder.

Fredegund died 8 December 597 in Paris. The tomb of Frédégonde is a mosaic figure of marble and copper, situated in the Saint Denis Basilica, having come from the abbey church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Fredegund in folklore

Fredegund has been proposed as one of many sources for the folk tale known as Cinderella. In *Cinderella: A Casebook*, folklorist Alan Dundes cites the following excerpt from Gregory's *History of the Franks*:

She was jealous of her own daughter, Rigunth, who continually declared that she should be mistress^[3] in her place. Fredegund waited her opportunity and under the pretense of magnanimity



Fredegund and Rigunth, steel engraving from Mme de Witt, *Vieilles histoires de la patrie*, 1887



Fig. 41.—Queen Frédégonde, seated on her throne, gives orders to two young men of Austrasia to assassinate Sigebert, King of Austrasia.—Window in the Cathedral of Tournai, Fifteenth Century.

Fredegund, seated on her throne, gives orders to assassinate Sigebert, King of Austrasia, steel engraving after a 15th century window in the Cathedral of Tournai

took her to the treasure-room and showed her the King's jewels in a large chest. Feigning fatigue, she exclaimed "I am weary; put thou in thy hand, and take out what thou mayest find." The mother thereupon forced down the lid on her neck and would have killed her had not the servants finally rushed to her aid.

When Rigunth was sent off to her Visigothic fiancé in Spain Reccared, son of Liuvigild, her entourage was so laden with rich gifts that the Frankish nobles objected, that the royal fisc had been depleted. Fredegund asserted that all the gifts had come out of property amassed by her husband's generosity. On the long journey, Rigunth's retainers repeatedly robbed and abandoned her, and by the time she reached Toulouse there was little left.^[4] When Chilperic died in 584 AD, Desiderius of Aquitaine went to Toulouse, France to secure the remaining treasure.

References

- ↑ [ⓘ] "Fredegunda". *New International Encyclopedia*. 1906.
 - ↑ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia* (New York: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2000), p. 607
 - ↑ Probably, as the translator O. M. Dalton notes, because Fredegund began life as a palace maid, while she was of royal blood, being a king's daughter.
 - ↑ Gregory's report is repeated by Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe: 500-1100", *Feminist Studies* **1.3/4** (Winter - Spring, 1973:126-141), p.130, with the observation "it required a strong hand and constant vigilance to retain wealth in those times".
- Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, Book IX. Ch. 34, Translated by O. M. Dalton, Vol. II. pp. 405–406
 - Alan Dundes, *Cinderella: A Casebook*, Ch. 1 *The Cat Cinderella by Giambattista Basile* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

External links

[ⓘ] Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Fredegond". *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fredegund&oldid=543748528"

Categories: 6th-century births | 597 deaths | 6th-century female rulers | Frankish queens consort

| Soissonaire queens consort | Merovingian dynasty | Female regents | Mistresses of French royalty

| Burials at the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés | 6th-century rulers in Europe

| Burials at the Basilica of St Denis

-
- This page was last modified on 13 March 2013 at 02:39.
 - Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy.
Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.