

Matilda of Ringelheim

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Saint Mathilda (or **Matilda**, c. 895 – 14 March 968) was the wife of King Henry I of Germany, the first ruler of the Saxon Ottonian (or Liudolfing) dynasty, thereby Duchess consort of Saxony from 912 and German Queen from 919 until 936. Their eldest son Otto succeeded his father as German King and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 962. Matilda's surname refers to Ringelheim, where her comital Immedinger relatives established a convent about 940.

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Biography

The details of Saint Matilda's life come largely from brief mentions in the *Res gestae saxonicae* of the monastic historian Widukind of Corvey (c. 925 – 973), and from two sacred biographies (the *vita antiquior* and *vita posterior*) written, respectively, circa 974 and circa 1003.

St. Mathilda was the daughter of the Westphalian count Dietrich and his wife Reinhild, and her biographers traced her ancestry back to the legendary Saxon leader Widukind (c. 730 – 807). One of her sisters married Count Wichmann the Elder, a member of the House of Billung.

As a young girl, she was sent to the convent of Herford, where her grandmother Matilda was abbess and where her reputation for beauty and virtue (probably also her Westphalian dowry) is said to have attracted the attention of Duke Otto I of Saxony, who betrothed her to his recently divorced son and heir, Henry the Fowler. They were married at Wallhausen in 909. As the eldest surviving son, Henry succeeded his father as Saxon duke in 912 and upon the death of King Conrad I of Germany was elected King of Germany (East Francia) in 919. He and Matilda had three sons and two daughters:

- Hedwig (910 – 965), wife of the West Frankish duke Hugh the Great, mother of King Hugh Capet of France
- Otto (912 – 973), Duke of Saxony, King of Germany from 936 and Holy Roman Emperor from 962
- Gerberga (913 – 984), wife of (1) Duke Giselbert of Lorraine and (2) King Louis IV of France
- Henry (919/921 – 955) Duke of Bavaria from 948
- Bruno (925 – 965), Archbishop of Cologne and Duke of Lorraine

Saint Matilda



Heinricus rex and Methildis regina, Chronica St. Pantaleonis, 12th century

Queen of East Francia

Born	c. 895 Enger(?), Duchy of Saxony, East Francia
Died	14 March 968 Quedlinburg, Duchy of Saxony, Holy Roman Empire
Major shrine	Quedlinburg Abbey

After her husband had died in 936, Matilda and her son Otto established Quedlinburg Abbey in his memory, a convent of noble canonesses, where in 966 her granddaughter Matilda became the first abbess. At first she remained at the court of her son Otto, however in the quarrels between the young king and his rivaling brother Henry a cabal of royal advisors is reported to have accused her of weakening the royal treasury in order to pay for her charitable activities. After a brief exile at her Westphalian manors at Enger, where she established a college of canons in 947, Matilda was brought back to court at the urging of King Otto's first wife, the Anglo-Saxon princess Edith of Wessex.

Matilda died at Quedlinburg, outliving her husband by 32 years. Her and Henry's mortal remains are buried at the crypt of the St. Servatius' abbey church.

Veneration

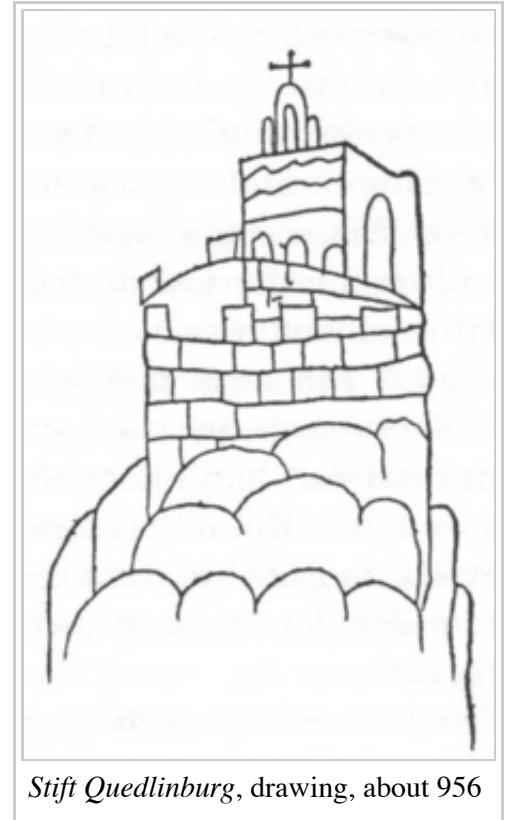
Saint Matilda was celebrated for her devotion to prayer and almsgiving; her first biographer depicted her (in a passage indebted^[citation needed] to the sixth-century *vita* of the Frankish queen Radegund by Venantius Fortunatus) leaving her husband's side in the middle of the night and sneaking off to church to pray. St. Mathilda founded many religious institutions, including the canonry of Quedlinburg, which became a center of ecclesiastical and secular life in Germany under the rule of the Ottonian dynasty, as well as the convents of St. Wigbert in Quedlinburg, in Pöhlde, Enger and Nordhausen in Thuringia, likely the source of at least one of her *vitae*.

She was later canonized, with her cult largely confined to Saxony and Bavaria. St. Mathilda's feast day according to the German calendar of saints is on March 14.

Sources


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Stift Quedlinburg, drawing, about 956

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Matilda of Ringelheim		
Born: 895 Died: 968		
Preceded by Hedwiga of Franconia	Duchess consort of Saxony 912–936	Succeeded by Edith of Wessex
Preceded by Cunigunde of Swabia	German Queen 919–936	

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