

William of Gellone

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Saint **William of Gellone**, also known as **William of Aquitaine**,^{[1][2]} (755 – 28 May (traditional) 812/4) was the second Count of Toulouse from 790 until his replacement in 811. His Occitan name is **Guilhem**, and he is known in French as **Guillaume d'Orange**, **Guillaume Fierabrace**, and the **Marquis au court nez**. William was canonized a saint on 1066 by Pope Alexander II.^[1]

He is the hero of the *Chanson de Guillaume*, an early *chanson de geste*, and of several later sequels, which were categorized by thirteenth-century poets as the *geste* of Garin de Monglane. Another early product of oral traditions about William is a Latin *Vita* ("Biography"), written before the 11th century, according to Jean Mabillon, or during the 11th century according to the Bollandist Godfrey Henschen.

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William in history

William was born in northern France in the mid-8th century. He was a cousin of Charlemagne (his mother Aldana was daughter of Charles Martel) and the son of Thierry IV, Count of Autun. As a kinsman and trusted *comes* he spent his youth in the court of Charlemagne. In 788, Chorso, Count of Toulouse, was captured by the Basque Adalric, and made to swear an oath of allegiance to the Duke of Gascony, Lupus II. Upon his release Charlemagne replaced him with his Frankish cousin William (790). William in turn successfully subdued the Gascons.

In 793, Hisham I, the successor of Abd ar-Rahman I, proclaimed a holy war against the Christians to the north. He amassed an army of 100,000 men, half of which attacked the Kingdom of Asturias while the other half invaded Languedoc, penetrating as far as Narbonne.

Saint William of Gellone



William of Gellone by Guercino

Born	c. 755 somewhere in Northern France
Died	28 May 812 or 28 May 814 Gellone, near Lodève?
Honored in	Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church
Major shrine	Monastery of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert in Gellone, France
Feast	May 28

William met this force and defeated them. He met the Muslim forces again near the river Orbieu at Villedaigne but was defeated, though his obstinate resistance exhausted the Muslim forces so much that they retreated to Spain. In 801, William commanded along with Louis King of Aquitaine a large expedition of Franks, Burgundians, Provençals, Aquitanians, Gascons (Basques) and Goths that captured Barcelona from the Moors.

In 804, he founded the monastery of Gellone (now Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert) near Lodève in the diocese of Maguelonne. He granted property to Gellone and placed the monastery under the general control of Benedict of Aniane, whose monastery was nearby. Among his gifts to the abbey he founded was a piece of the True Cross, a present from his cousin Charlemagne. Charlemagne had received the relic from the Patriarch of Jerusalem according to the *Vita* of William.

In 806, William retired to Gellone as a monk and eventually died there on 28 May 812 (or 814). When he died, it was said the bells at Orange rang on their own accord.

William mentioned both his family and monastery in his will.^[3] His will of 28 January 804, names his living wives Gunegunde and Guitburgi, his deceased parents, Teuderico and Aldana, two brothers, Teudoino and Adalelmo, two sisters, Abbana and Bertana, four sons, Barnardo, Guitcario, Gotcelmo, and Helmbruc, no daughters, and one nephew, Bertrano.^[4] His wife Guitburgi is said to have been the widow of the Moorish wali of Orange taken by William in his battles against the Umayyad army of Hisham I in and around the county of Narbona about 793-796. His son Barnardo is said to have been by Guitburgi. Her name before her baptism was Orable.^[5] It is not clear if she married William or was held in concubinage, although he calls her his wife in his will.

Gellone remained under the control of the abbots of Aniane. It became a subject of contention however as the reputation of William grew. So many pilgrims were attracted to Gellone that his corpse was exhumed from the modest site in the narthex and given a more prominent place under the choir, to the intense dissatisfaction of the Abbey of Aniane. A number of forged documents and assertions were produced on each side that leave details of actual history doubtful. The Abbey was a major stop for pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. Its late 12th century Romanesque cloister, systematically dismantled during the French revolution, found its way to The Cloisters in New York. The *Sacramentary of Gellone*, dating to the late 8th century, is a famous manuscript.

William in romance

Main article: La Geste de Garin de Monglane

William's faithful service to Charlemagne is portrayed as an example of feudal loyalty. William's career battling Saracens is sung in epic poems in the 12th and 13th century cycle called *La Geste de Garin de Monglane*, some two dozen *chansons de geste* that actually center around William, the great-grandson of the largely legendary Garin.

One section of the cycle, however, is devoted to the feats of his father, there named Aymeri de Narbonne, who has received Narbonne as his seigniory after his return from Spain with Charlemagne. Details of the "Aymeri" of the poem are conflated with a later historic figure who was truly the viscount of Narbonne from 1108 to 1134.



Romanesque apse of Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert, originally Gellone, the monastery William founded in 804 and entered in 806.

In the *chanson* he is awarded Ermengart, daughter of Didier, and sister of Boniface, king of the Lombards. Among his seven sons and five daughters (one of whom marries Louis the Pious) is William.

The defeat of the Moors at Orange was given legendary treatment in the 12th century epic *La Prise d'Orange*. There, he was made Count of Toulouse in the stead of the disgraced Chorso, then King of Aquitaine in 778. He is difficult to separate from the legends and poems that gave him feats of arms, lineage and titles: Guillaume Fièbrebras, Guillaum au Court-Nez (broken in a battle with a giant), Guillaum de Narbonne, Guillaume d'Orange. His wife is said to have been a converted Saracen, Orable later christened Guibourc.

Later references

In 1972 historian Arthur Zuckerman published *A Jewish Princedom in Feudal France*, a book about the dynasty of Makhir of Narbonne. In that book, Zuckerman argued that it was possible that William of Gellone was in fact one of the sons of Makhir, who he identified with the individual known in medieval sources as “Theodoric, King of the Jews of Septimania.” Zuckerman made no definitive conclusions on this point, and the suggestion has since been refuted. (Graboïs, Aryeh, “Une Principaute Juive dans la France du Midi a l'Époque Carolingienne?”, *Annales du Midi*, 85: 191-202 (1973); N.L. Taylor, “Saint William, King David, and Makhir: a Controversial Medieval Descent”, *The American Genealogist*, 72: 205-223.)

William, listed under the name “Guillem de Gellone”, is a prominent figure in the pseudohistorical book *Holy Blood Holy Grail*. The book claims that through his father Theodoric William was of Merovingian descent and also a “Jew of royal blood”. Drawing on Zuckermann’s thesis, the book claimed that “modern scholarship and research have proved Guillem’s Judaism beyond dispute.” The book used William’s supposed heritage as a genealogical link between the House of David, the Merovingian nobility, and France, in order to make a case that the Holy Grail was actually the bloodline of Jesus that had worked its way into the bloodline of Frankish royalty. This line of reasoning was later incorporated into the plot of the bestselling novel *The Da Vinci Code*.

Preceded by Torson	Count of Toulouse 790–811	Succeeded by Beggo
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References

- ^a ^b “William of Aquitaine, St.” (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/article-1G2-3407711861/william-aquitaine-st.html>). Encyclopedia.com. Retrieved on 2014-01-17.
 - ^a “St. William of Gellone” (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15633a.htm>). New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia. Retrieved on 2014-01-17.
 - ^a <http://www.fordham.edu/halsallfrench/g1.htm>
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 - “L’Abbaye de Saint-Guilhem-le-Desert” (<http://medieval.mrugala.net/Architecture/Saint%20Guilhem%20le%20desert/>) (in French)
 - Metropolitan Museum: The Saint-Guilhem Cloister (http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/viewOne.asp?dep=7&viewmode=0&isHighlight=1&item=25.120.1-.134)
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