

# CLOVIS I OF FRANCE



**BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK**

## CLOVIS THE FIRST

(465-511 C.E.)

The honor of having established the French monarchy and the French nation, of having raised himself from his position as chief of a petty and turbulent tribe to be the ruler of a powerful and permanent kingdom, unquestionably belongs to Clovis the First, who was born in the year 465 C.E. The multitude of petty kingdoms subsisting in Gaul (today's France) at this time, forms, says an illustrious historian, one of the greatest difficulties in the ancient history of France.

1. When was Clovis I born?

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In a manuscript work, still preserved in the King's library at Paris, Clovis' rise to power is imputed to the disorders which prevailed after the expulsion of Childeric, father of Clovis. Such men as were sufficiently powerful took advantage of the anarchy in which the nation was involved, to establish independent monarchies of their own.

2. Who was the father of Clovis I?

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Clovis ascended the throne at the age of fifteen. At the early age of twenty, he began to show his jealousy toward those whom he considered usurpers of his territories. His courtiers, ever ready to fan into a flame the spark they had discovered in the breast of their master, incited him to challenge Syagrius, a Roman who still had possession of Soissons and a part of the adjacent country.

3. How old was Clovis when he ascended the throne?

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The challenge was accepted by this self-made prince, and a bloody battle was the result. Syagrius saved himself by flight, taking refuge among the Visigoths. But Alaric II, then king, fearing the threats of Clovis, delivered the refugee into his power, who caused him to be beheaded.

4. Who was beheaded?

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The Frankish leader was now a man of note in the world; but he was still nothing more than the leader of a band of warriors, often retaining his authority only by brute force. At one time, Clovis' band having stormed the Christian city of Rheims (or Reims) and carried off from its church a vase "of marvelous size and beauty," the bishop sent word to their leader entreating him to return it. "That will I," responded Clovis to the envoy, "if when we divide our spoil the vase falls to my lot."

In his desire to gratify the bishop, who was an old friend, the chieftain went a step beyond his promise and requested his companions to give him the great vase as his share. Then cried one of their number, striking the trophy angrily with his axe, "No, you shall draw lots with the rest of us, and take what comes honestly to you." His comrades, however, felt that this was going too far. The vase was given to their leader, and by him returned to Rheims.

5. From which city did Clovis' warriors take a large, beautiful vase?

6. Who returned the vase to Rheims?

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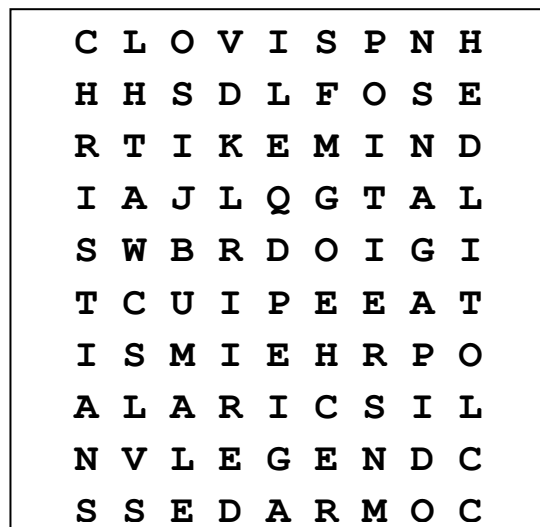


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### Word Search Puzzle



Alaric	comrades
Childeric	legend
Christians	pagans
Clotilde	Poitiers
Clovis	Rheims

**Vocabulary Terms:** Match each term (found in the text above) with its definition.

7. \_\_\_\_ a person who flees from one place to another, usually during wartime
8. \_\_\_\_ a very large number
9. \_\_\_\_ adjoining or neighboring
10. \_\_\_\_ agitated, disordered, and violent
11. \_\_\_\_ estimated to have a certain value
12. \_\_\_\_ famous and renowned
13. \_\_\_\_ jurisdiction, or the right to settle disputes or issues
14. \_\_\_\_ the act of driving out
15. \_\_\_\_ the original, often handwritten, version of an author's work
16. \_\_\_\_ those who attend to the royal family at court
17. \_\_\_\_ those who seize and hold power without the legal right to do so
18. \_\_\_\_ to mount or rise

**Terms**

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|-----------------|----------------|
| (A) adjacent    | (G) imputed    |
| (B) ascend      | (H) manuscript |
| (C) authority   | (I) multitude  |
| (D) courtiers   | (J) refugee    |
| (E) expulsion   | (K) turbulent  |
| (F) illustrious | (L) usurpers   |

A year passed, and Clovis gave no sign that he remembered the affront. Then, having called his band together for a review, Clovis passed them one by one, examining and approving their arms, till, last of all, he reached the warrior who had opposed him; and he eyed this man sternly. "Your weapons suit you poorly," he said, "none of them are fit

for service." And, snatching the man's axe from him he threw it to the ground. The other stooped to recover it, when, whirling up his own axe, Clovis crashed it through the rebel's skull. "'Twas so you struck my vase," he cried.

19. Do you believe that Clovis' use of deadly force was justified on this

**Clovis I of France**

occasion? Was this violent act a worthwhile move in political terms? Why or why not?

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Such a leader, who could so long await a fitting opportunity, and then so sternly avenge an insult to his power, was well calculated to wield great authority among these stern and hardy warriors. He had enjoyed several years of uninterrupted tranquility, when Basinus, King of Thuringia, made a sudden irruption into that part of the dominions of Clovis situated beyond the Rhine. Clovis was no sooner informed of this invasion, than he assembled his army, and entering the enemy's country, laid it waste with fire and sword, and imposed a perpetual tribute on the offending monarch.

20. What kind revolted in Clovis' dominions beyond the Rhine?

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Clovis now bent his thoughts on the formation of an alliance by marriage with some of the neighboring princes. He accordingly dispatched his ambassadors to the King of Burgundy, asking for the hand of the Princess Clotildis (or Clotilde), his niece, the accounts of whose extraordinary piety and beauty had made a deep impression on his heart. The court of Burgundy, fearful of offending a young and powerful prince, whose arms had hitherto been everywhere victorious, complied with his request.

21. Whom did Clovis marry?

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Great preparations were made for the departure of the queen elect, and she began her journey in a kind of wagon, called *basterne*, drawn by oxen, which was the most elegant vehicle then in use. The marriage was celebrated at Soissons, amid the joyful acclamations of the people.

22. Where were Clovis and Clotilde married?

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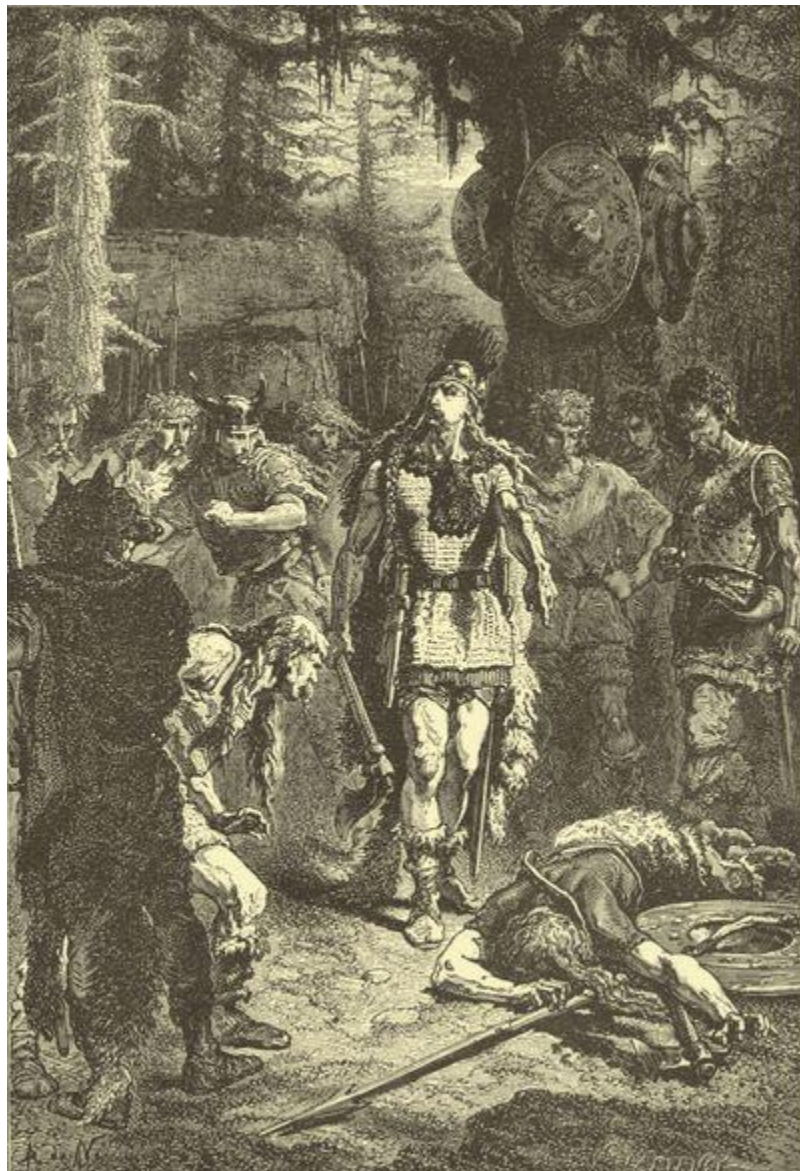
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Heaven smiled on this propitious union. Clotildis became

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mother of a prince, who received baptism with the king's consent, and was named Ingomer. The subsequent death of this child, on whom Clovis had so firmly set his affections, inspired him, notwithstanding the prayers and remonstrances of his affectionate and pious princess, with an aversion to the Christian religion.

Clovis was prevailed on, however, to suffer (let) his second son to undergo the ceremony of baptism. This second son also was attacked by a severe indisposition, but the prayers of this pious woman were heard and answered, the young prince restored to health, and the anxiety of his father dispelled.



*Clovis punishing a rebel.*

The conversion to Christianity of Clovis, soon after this, is thus related by historians: The Germans had commenced preparing for incursions into the dominions of Clovis. He, being apprised of their intentions, hastened to impede their progress, and met them on the plains of Tolbiac, not far from Cologne, where a bloody battle was fought. Clovis, perceiving that the strength of his army was diminishing, lifted up his eyes to Heaven, and exclaimed, "God of my Queen Clotildis, grant me victory, and I here vow to worship none other than you." Clovis immediately rallied his yielding forces, again led the charge, pierced with irresistible ardor the enemy's battalions, and entirely put them to flight. Clovis then followed them into Germany, where he dispersed the remains of the vanquished army, reduced to obedience a nation hitherto invincible, and compelled them to pay him an annual tribute.

23. Why was Clovis moved to convert to Christianity?

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Faithful to his vow, Clovis requested to be made acquainted with the mysteries of the Christian religion. On Christmas Day, 496 C.E., Clovis received baptism at the church of St. Martin, in Paris, from Remigius, Bishop of Rheims, a prelate equally distinguished for his birth and piety. Clovis' sister Albofleda, and about three thousand of his subjects, followed his example. An improbable legend prevails, that during the ceremony of the baptism of Clovis, a dove descended from Heaven, bringing a phial of balsam, with which he was consecrated. This is what is now called La Sainte Ampoule, the Holy Phial. La Sainte Ampoule was kept with extreme care, and contained the oil used by the monarchs of France at their coronation.

24. Describe the legend of the Holy Phial in your own words.

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The conversion of Clovis had not repressed his warlike ambition. Brabant, the country of Liege, and that part of Flanders which was situated on the sea-coast, had not yet submitted to the new conqueror of Gaul.

The most considerable of these small states was the Arborici, a Christian nation, firmly attached to the Christian religion, and thence maintaining an enmity against the French, who were pagans. But the recent conversion to Christianity of Clovis and so many of his subjects diminished the aversion of the people of this peaceful nation. The Arborici were induced to consent to an alliance with Clovis, acknowledge him as their sovereign, and become subjects of the French kingdom. The Roman garrisons, following the example, capitulated and gave up all the places that were still in their possession, toward the ocean and on the banks of the Rhine.

Clovis did not as yet consider his victories complete. The conquest of Brittany was soon followed by that of Alaric II, King of the Visigoths. Before the French set out on this latter expedition, they made a vow not to shave themselves till they had subdued their enemies. Vows of this kind were very common at that period.

25. Who was king of the Visigoths (Western Goths) at this time?

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It was the custom of those times to draw an omen from the verse that was chanting, when a person entered the church. The king's envoys, at their entrance into the church of St. Martin, heard these words from the Psalms: "Thou hast endued me with strength for the wars; thou hast supplanted those that had risen up against me; and hast put mine enemies to flight." This fortunate prognostic was confirmed on the banks of the Vienne. The army was at a loss where to pass that river, when a hind plunged into the stream in sight of the whole camp, and showed them a ford which still retains the name of the Passage of the Hind.

The two armies met in the plains of Vouille, near Poitiers. Soon after the commencement of the battle, the monarchs of either nation perceiving each other, rushed forward at the same instant, and engaged in single combat. When the superior skill and strength of Clovis decided the victory in his favor, Clovis dismounted his adversary, and slew him on the spot.



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26. How did Clovis help to win the battle at Vouille?

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27. What was the last remarkable event of the reign of France's Clovis I?

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Nothing now remained to impede the progress of the conqueror, who extended his empire from the banks of the Loire to the Pyrenean mountains. Clovis then withdrew to Paris, and fixed his residence in a palace in the southern part of the capital, which had formerly been inhabited by the emperors Julian and Valentinian the First. Success had hitherto attended all the plans of Clovis, and allowing for the ferocious and martial spirit which then prevailed, he had preserved his fame from any material pollution.

28. Historians dispute "whether the military or the political talents of (Clovis) were most eminent." Settle this dispute based on your knowledge of Clovis I.

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The assembling of the Council of Orleans was the last remarkable event of the reign of Clovis, who died the same year, 511 C.E., at the age of forty-five. Clovis was buried in the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, which he had caused to be built. It has been a subject of dispute with historians, whether the military or the political talents of this prince were the most eminent. Gaul, subdued by his arms, preserved by his prudence, affords a proof that he was equally skillful in the cabinet and formidable in the field.