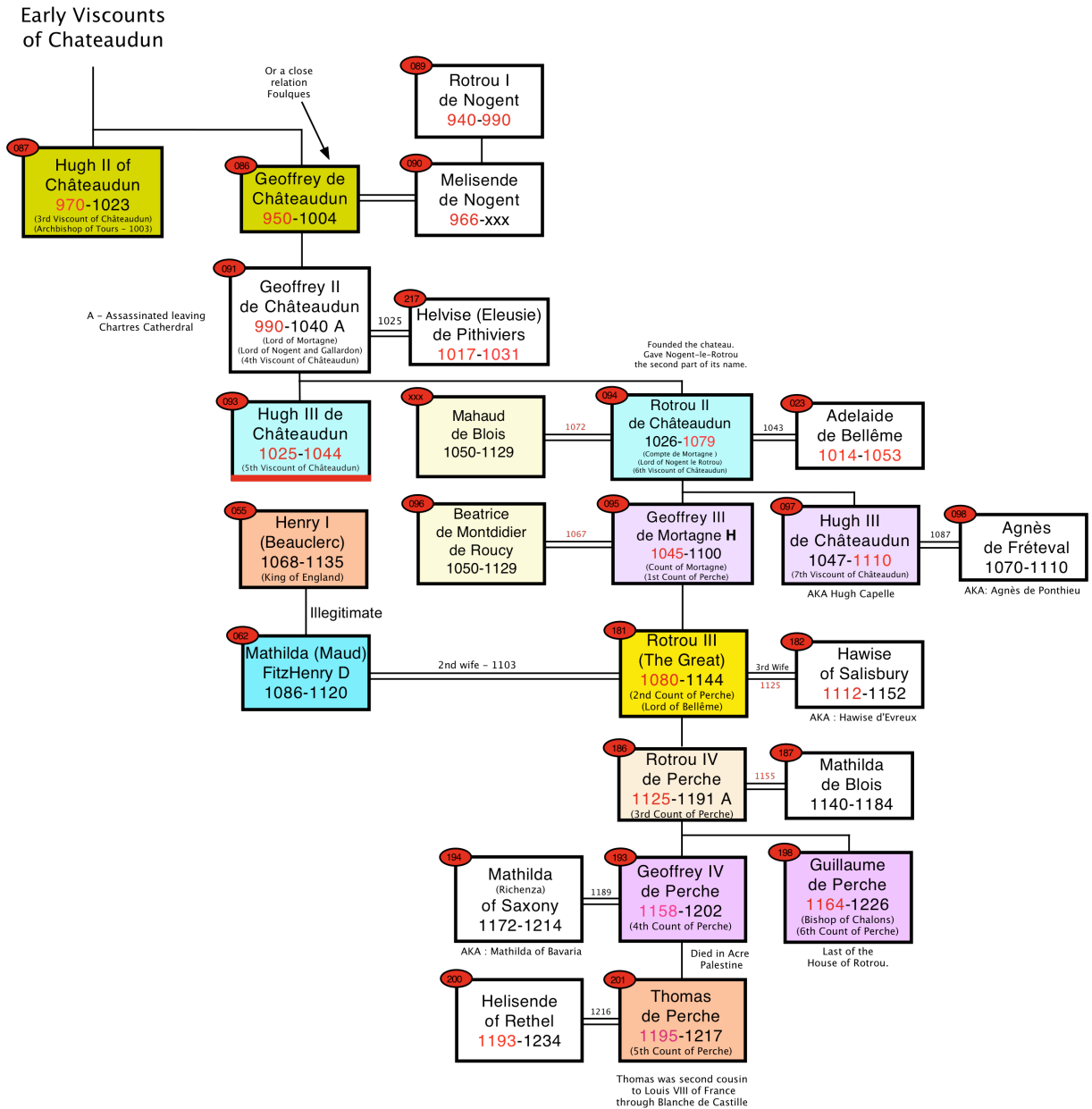


# Viscounts and Counts

## (The House of Rotrou in France)



Although open to discussion, and within the limits of all the available documents, the above diagram could represent a fair and logical description of the descent of the early Rotrou family, the Viscounts of Châteaudun and the Counts of Perche, between the 10th and the 12th centuries. Not all of the family members are included in this diagram.

Some of the areas in this descendency are open to speculation, but the results of my research overcome many of the inconsistencies which are found in the other hypotheses.

*The notes found in this document make references to certain books written by historians or genealogists, concerning the History of the Perche. A list of these authors, and their works, may be found in the Bibliography, at the end of this document.*

*The attached diagram is but a small fragment of the "House of Rotrou", a relatively minor noble family which rose "from obscure origins to princely power"<sup>1</sup> during the 10th to 12th centuries. Some of the dates here are approximate, and are marked in red, and must be taken with caution. Numbers have been added to the different members of the family, as the name Geoffrey, Hugh and Rotrou were used in abundance. However, these numbers were probably not used in their time, and historians sometimes have conflicting numbering systems. As an example, the Rotrous may be numbered from the first known (Rotrou I, Rotrou II, etc.), but many historians have numbered them from the second (Rotrou, Rotrou I, etc). Dates, even approximate, are often quoted in the first occurrence of the name, to eliminate confusion.*

The long list of Viscounts and Counts descended from the Rotrou Family origins covers nearly 200 years. During this period, the power of the Rotrou dynasty, which began from apparently limited resources, continues to increase. However, the beginnings of this long climb to fame began certainly by chance. Most historians agree that our first Rotrou (940-1000) had no titles when he appears on the scene in 963. He was most probably of inferior nobility, a vassal, although highly trusted, of Thibault The Trickster, Count of Blois and Chartres (and later his son Eudes I). Certain references showing that he was Count of Perche before 963, and that he lost control of the town of Bellême in a war against the Normans, are possibly true<sup>2</sup>. That he was given control of the domain of Nogent about the year 980, either by Thibault or Eudes is certainly not in doubt. In 996, he is referred to as "Rotroco de Nogiamo" (Rotrou de Nogent), and appears to have gained greatly in reputation. Rotrou's daughter Melisende<sup>3</sup> was chosen to marry one of the "members" of the Châteaudun family, probably as a "Thank You" for services rendered to the House of Châteaudun and the House of Blois. We are not quite sure who it was, either Geoffrey (963-1005) or maybe even a lesser known relation Foulques, of whom nothing is known. We are not even sure how a lesser family such as the Rotrous were allowed into the inner circle of nobility, unless, of course, the Rotrou descendants had ties to the House of Châteaudun that we are unaware of. Rotrou, the first of the family that comes to our attention, had served

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<sup>1</sup> Direct quote from the front jacket of Kathleen Thompson's book - Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France - County of the Perche (1000-1226).

<sup>2</sup> That he lost control of the town of Bellême is not contested. However, several historical sources already define Rotrou as "Count of Perche". Chronicles of the time (Wace, Trouvère Benoit), confirm this eventuality. At best, he may have been "Lord", for he was certainly not senior to the Viscounts of Châteaudun

<sup>3</sup> Although M.O. Des Murs - Histoire des Comtes du Perche Page 37 suggests that Rotrou marries Mélisende de Châteaudun, most historians (De Romanet , etc.) agree that it was probably Rotrous daughter Mélisende who married into the House of Châteaudun. The confusion between Mélisende de Nogent and Mélisende de Châteaudun can only be explained if there were two Mélisendes (mother and daughter) !

the House of Blois for some time. Because the House of Châteaudun was itself subservient to the House of Blois, and Rotrou was in great favour with Thibault, we may imagine that some strings were pulled to allow the Rotrou family access into the House of Châteaudun, although it was certainly inconceivable at this time to suppose that Mélisendes son would soon become Viscount. The apparent renown of Rotrou, steeped in mystery even today, must come from his family in the county of the Perche, who were reputed to be Counts, although we have no proof concerning this theory.

In this document, you will find thumbnail sketches of the members of the De Nogent family who became Viscounts of Châteaudun or Counts of Perche. Other members of the family will be treated in separate documents.

## **Yves de Bellême**

The reader must be surprised to find here a section on a member of the Bellême family. Throughout our history of our Rotrou family, we have insisted that the two families were not (to our knowledge) connected, and that moreover they were enemies for more than 100 years during the 10th and 11th centuries. However, until such time as the two families were associated by several peace-making marriages <sup>4</sup>, the Bellême family were an important part of the Rotrou history, if only because the two families were sworn enemies.

Due to the fact that the early members of the Bellême family were not noble, very little was known about them. They are supposed to have originated in a small town to the north of Paris, called Creil. Apparently, there were two Yves de Creil (father and son), although some historians suggest that they were one and the same person. The Yves de Creil that we know of appeared on the scene in 942, when his actions helped save the life of Richard, Duke of Normandy <sup>5</sup> who had been captured by King Louis IV of France. Louis' objective was to rid himself of the Duke, and take control of Normandy. Through a ruse, Yves helped in the escape of Duke Robert, and would later be handsomely rewarded for his act.

Yves was known for his talents as "balistarius", a rather vague title which covered the field of archery, the building of war machines such as Balistas, etc. It appears that Yves became a vital part of the Norman military strategy, and developed as a master of attack and defence mechanisms for the Duke. In 963, when the town of Bellême was taken in battle by the Normans, as a gesture for services rendered, Yves de Creil was named Lord of Bellême, and he and his descendants moved one step up the ladder of fame. Some historians and genealogists quote him as being a powerful Norman Baron, which is a three-time falsehood <sup>6</sup>. However, he and his descendants bathed in an aura of power and respectability from this period onwards. As Rotrou apparently lost control of the town of Bellême, he and Yves,

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<sup>4</sup> The marriages did not suffice to bring the families together. Only Henry II, King of England could bring the Belleme family to heel, and many years would pass before this was possible.

<sup>5</sup> Richard was the grandson of the Viking Rollo, who had been attributed Neustria (Normandy) by the treaty of Saint-Clair-Sur-Epte in 911.

<sup>6</sup> He was not powerful, he was not Norman, and he was not a Baron. See Chapter 14 - Bellême or not Bellême ?

and descendants of both families became irreconcilable enemies <sup>7</sup>. Bellême would return to the house of Rotrou many years later. By this time, the de Nogent descendants of the Rotrou family had become Counts of a (nearly) united Perche, and the descendants of the Bellême family had nearly destroyed themselves in an internal war of murder and treachery.

## The Early Viscounts of Chateaudun

Historical information concerning the Viscounts of Châteaudun is certainly better than for the early House of Rotrou. The chain of command, so to speak with respect to nobility in France in the early Xth Century was spread over three levels ; the King himself, the Counts at the second level, and at the lowest level, the Viscounts. Any information lower than the Viscounts was not of sufficient importance to "hit the news". For this reason we are lucky to dispose of minimum data concerning the house of Rotrou at this time. Kathleen Thompson in her book dedicated to the history of the Perche <sup>8</sup>, and especially the House of Rotrou quite clearly states her case. Information concerning the nobility of France at this period was limited, but for the County of the Perche and the Rotrou family, "it was better than most".

Because the Rotrou Family were first linked and eventually merged into the House of Châteaudun, it may be a good idea to indicate the early Châteaudun Viscounts, before Mélisende apparently married into their family.

The early history of the family is clouded with uncertainty for several reasons. The early Xth century lacks historical data, even for the noble families. Most of these Viscounts were named Geoffrey or Hughes, and confusion is understandable. Finally, the wives of two Viscounts, named Hermengarde and Hildegarde may have been one and the same person.

There are several hypotheses concerning the descent of the viscomptal title within the House of Châteaudun. Each of these hypotheses is quoted from a reputable genealogist or historian. We will also include FranceBalade, which appears to be a serious and knowledgable Internet source.

Title	Settipani	De Romanet	Thompson	De Murs	FranceBalade
1 <sup>st</sup> Viscount	not specified	Geoffrey	Geoffrey	???	Rampo Geoffrey
2 <sup>nd</sup> Viscount	Geoffrey	Hughes	Hughes	Geoffrey	Hughes
3 <sup>rd</sup> Viscount	Hughes	Geoffrey	Hughes	Hughes	Hughes
4 <sup>th</sup> Viscount	Geoffrey	Geoffrey	Geoffrey	Geoffrey	Geoffrey
5 <sup>th</sup> Viscount	Hughes	Hughes	Hughes	Hughes	Hughes
6 <sup>th</sup> Viscount	Rotrou II	Rotrou II	Rotrou II	Rotrou II	Rotrou II

<sup>7</sup> M.O. Des Murs - Histoire des Comtes du Perche Page 106 - "mais on comprend que dès ce moment, cette maison et celle des Rotrous ou de Mortagne soient devenues ennemies irréconciliables"

<sup>8</sup> Yet another direct quote from the introduction in Kathleen Thompsons book.

Confusing, to say the least, but at least we all agree from Viscount No. 3 onwards. Historians note that the beginning of the XIth century provided more substantial and correct data, especially when the Rotrou family married into the House of Châteaudun.

## **Geoffrey II de Châteaudun (990-1040)**

The early references to the Rotrou family, in which Geoffrey de Mortagne forms an important part, can be found in the middle of the 10th century, when a certain Rotrou was known to have seconded Thibault, Count of Blois and Chartres, in his efforts to support the King of France, Lothaire. Because of the scarcity of valid information available at this time, we have two possible scenarios :

Viscount de Romanet suggests that Rotrou had a son and successor called Geoffrey, in about the year 987, and that Geoffrey became Count of Mortagne. Geoffrey married Mélisende, daughter of Hughes and Hildegarde of Châteaudun. However, he also suggests another possibility : that Mélisende was the daughter of Rotrou, Lord of Nogent, and that she married into the House of Châteaudun. Her son Geoffrey, became Viscount of Châteaudun. These two scenarios both give the same result, although scenario two leaves doubt as to Mélisende's husband <sup>9</sup>. However M. Chevrard, Mayor of Chartres (1811), and other authors quote Geoffrey as having the double name of Geoffrey-Rotrou, which would seem to indicate a family connection with Rotrou (either his mother, and/or his grandfather).

Other historians have also studied the way in which Mélisende's son Geoffrey became Viscount, and also suggested that Mélisende was the daughter of Rotrou. The most plausible scenario is that Mélisende marries Geoffrey de Châteaudun (963-1005), or was it a little known relation Foulques ? Although no proof has been found in historical documents concerning this marriage, it was probably in return for the building of the fortifications of the future town of Nogent-le-Rotrou, and their long-standing support to the House of Blois. Geoffrey (or Foulques) never held the title of Viscount of Châteaudun, which would have gone to the elder brother Hugh II. Hugh II is Viscount of Châteaudun at about this time, but gives up the title when he becomes Archbishop of Tours in 1003. Normally, the title would have passed to one of his brothers, or even to one of his sons, but for some reason (perhaps the early deaths of Geoffrey and Foulques, and the absence of a legitimate son), the title of Viscount passes to Melisende's son, Geoffrey II (990-1040), who will also hold the title of Lord of Nogent-le-Rotrou and Gallardon. This is most certainly a chance occurrence, as nothing would suggest that Rotrou's grandson would be so fortunate as to become Viscount, if there were two Châteaudun brothers in the direct line (unless they died earlier). Geoffrey is the first of the House of Rotrou to hold the title of Viscount of Châteaudun. From this moment, the House of Rotrou is on the first rung of a ladder which will take them into fame and fortune.

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<sup>9</sup> We will study the possibilities concerning Mélisende's husband in another chapter. However, we acknowledge the fact that the title "de Mortagne" is associated with the descendants. Where could this title come from, unless it was from Mélisende's husband ?

However, when Geoffrey succeeded to the title of Viscount in 1003, he must have cast a rueful eye on the lamentable state of his affairs. Bellême had been lost years before by his grandfather Rotrou, and in a long dispute against the Robert II, the King of France, his father had lost control over a part of Mortagne, and finally the fortress of Gallardon had been destroyed. Luckily, Geoffrey benefitted from disputes between the King of France and his vassals, and also from a protracted state of war between Herbert, Count of Le Mans and the House of Bellême. He calmly went about rebuilding the castle of Gallardon and sent packing Guillaume de St. Prest who had been invested there by King Robert. Fulbert, the Bishop of Chartres reacted violently to Geoffrey's new ventures with the only arm that he possessed. He caused Geoffrey to be excommunicated, a sanction which would normally bring to heel the most troublesome subjects. Geoffrey's reaction was equally swift, violent and unprecedented. He invaded the Bishop's lands, burning Ermenonville, Bailleu and Fresnay, while others profited from the situation by also invading the bishop's lands and burning all in their path. Decidedly, the Bishop was not appreciated by his flock ! Outraged by these events, Bishop Fulbert sought help from Eudes, Count of Chartres who ignored him completely. Geoffrey must have been confident that he could count on Eudes because of the long ties between the House of Rotrou and the Counts of Blois. Finally, even pleas to the King himself and to Richard, Duke of Normandy went unanswered, Fulbert had to back down, while recovering face, signing a charter where Geoffrey gave lands and chattels back to the Church. The excommunication was lifted, and Geoffrey quietly carried on with his plans to rebuild his birthright. Not only did he rebuild the existing fortresses, but he partially encroached on new territories by building a new one at Illiers [les-Combray]. But however much the Rotrou family coveted the Perche-Gout, the only tangible results to their incursions seem to have been this Château at Illiers <sup>10</sup>.

Geoffrey I marries a certain Helvise (1010-1031) around 1025. O. E. des Murs informs us that she is of unknown family, but defines her of the Mortagne family <sup>11</sup>. Geoffrey has three sons, Geoffrey (1026-1028), who dies an infant, Hugh III (1025-1050), and Rotrou I (1026-1079). Hugh III is the elder brother, but dies young, and Rotrou will inherit the title of Viscount of Châteaudun. In 1030, Geoffrey begins the foundations of the wonderful Monastery of St. Denis de Nogent. This work is of such importance, that his son Rotrou III will complete the monastery. Geoffrey was not bothered by Eudes, Robert or even Duke Richard, who died in 1027.

Geoffrey is relatively absent from the news until 1040. He enters Chartres Cathedral for an unknown ceremony, without his arms as was the custom of the day, and when he leaves, he is treacherously assassinated by unknown factions, although he was known to have enemies in Chartres, probably as a result of his protracted feud with Bishop Fulbert. It is left to the Abbé le Forestier to close the book on the long drawn-out disagreements between Geoffrey and Fulbert. He

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<sup>10</sup> The walls which protected this tiny town have disappeared long ago, and of its ancient château, there remain but few recognizable traces.

<sup>11</sup> We now know that she was Helvise de Pithivier, with no relation to the family of Mortagne.

wrote - "Had Fulbert lived long enough he would have recognised that Geoffrey was one of the most significant donators to the Church".

Known as "an able strategist", Geoffrey was assassinated quite young (1040), but rebuilt the Rotrou reputation which had suffered much in previous generations. Not only was he intelligent in war (he fought his enemies on THEIR ground), he was a wise and knowledgeable leader to his people, and on his death left a powerful domain to his sons.

### **Hughes II de Châteaudun (1025-1044)**

Hugh II is the elder son of Geoffrey, and according to certain historians, becomes Viscount of Châteaudun. However his mark upon the viscounty of Châteaudun was negligible, and he dies a few years later. M. O. des Murs even suggests that Hugh died before his father Geoffrey, and that the title of Viscount passed directly to the second son Rotrou II <sup>12</sup>. At some later date, Rotrou II indicates that he had succeeded his father directly, which would show that Hugh had in fact died before his father, as M. O. des Murs has informed us. Hugh is purported to have married a certain Adèle (Adila), although we have no information about this marriage, and there is no indication that Hugh had any children.

### **Rotrou II de Châteaudun (1026-1079)**

Hughes' younger brother Rotrou II inherits the title of Lord of Mortagne, Lord of Nogent, and Viscount of Châteaudun. Rotrou can only be 14 or 15 when his father dies, but he is surrounded by faithful followers of his father, who ensure that he is well versed in the arts of warfare.

Rotrou II marries Adelaide (Adeliza) de Bellême (1014-1053), probably an arrangement made by Ivo, Bishop of Sées, Adelaide's uncle. The Rotrou family and the Bellême family had been practically in a continuous state of war for many years, and this marriage could have been an effort to appease the animosity between the two families. In fact, it most certainly did not. However, Rotrou finds that he has common interests with Roger de Montgommery, the husband of his wife's cousin, Mabel, and with him, wages several unsuccessful campaigns into the territory of Perche-Gouet. It is probable that Roger was the intermediary between Rotrou and Guillaume, the Duke of Normandy, who, before attempting to invade England in 1066, made alliances with the major Lords of the area, including Rotrou in order to rally them to his cause. This was a major change of policy of the House of Rotrou, which had always treated the Normans as enemies. Rotrou's son Geoffrey de Mortagne will eventually accompany Guillaume's army to England.

In the middle of the XIth century, the home of the Rotrou family was still known as Nogent-le-Châtel, but very soon, with the rising importance of the family, will become known as Nogent-le-Rotrou, a name which it holds to this day. Rotrou marries about 1043, still a young man, and his wife according to an approximate date of birth would seem to have been about 10 years older than him. Rotrou and Adeliza (Adelaide de Bellême) have at least five sons, Geoffrey III de Mortagne (1045-1100) who inherits the title of Lord of Mortagne, and Hugh III (1047-1110)

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<sup>12</sup> M.O. Des Murs - Histoire des Comtes de Perche : De la Famille des Rotrous - 1856 (p.162)

who will have the title of Viscount of Châteaudun. The other sons, Rotrou, Foulques and Guérin are left without interest <sup>13</sup>, and several of the brothers go to England with Geoffrey. Of a daughter Helvise, and two other brothers, Jéréemie and Robert, we have no information at all. The marriage with Adelaide may seem to have been a strange turn of events, because the animosity between the two families was still predominant. It is believed that the marriage was arranged by Yves de Belleme, bishop of Sees, probably in the hope of reducing the "friction" between the two families. Apparently, this was not the case, but two events transpired from this marriage. Rotrou was brought into contact with Roger de Montgommery, his new cousin by marriage, who was a faithful ally of William, Duke of Normandy. Rotrou eventually readjusted his alliances in favour of the Norman Duke, and several of his sons accompanied William to England in the Conquest of England. The second event is of a historical nature. Certain genealogists later noted that Guérin de Domfront, the father of Adelaide was the great-grandfather (by marriage, of course) of Rotrou III, Count of Perche, and by this pretext, define the House of Bellême as being the root of the House of Rotrou <sup>14</sup>.

After the Conquest, in which Rotrou apparently took no part whatsoever, his son Rotrou returns to France and later marries into the Montfort family. Guérin leaves no trace after 1076, and Foulques (Fulquois), who has several sons who settle in England, is not seen after 1078. We are left to consider the possibility of the other sons, and a daughter, being illegitimate. The descendants of Foulques will go to Ireland nearly a hundred years later, and establish the long line of Nugents.

Relations with the new King of England appear to have improved immensely when Rotrou is actually paid a subsidy <sup>15</sup> by Guillaume when they both take part in the siege of Remalard in 1078. This situation clearly shows the ascending power of the House of Rotrou, and considerably enhances Rotrous' status, but it will be left to his descendants to profit from this "rapprochement", as Rotrou dies suddenly in 1079. His estates are divided between Geoffrey and Hugh, which, on hindsight, may be considered as an error, as the power of the House of Rotrou could easily suffer from fragmentation of the power that Rotrou has built with a certain business acumen. However, there are two major titles available for the two eldest sons.

### **Geoffrey III de Mortagne - 1st Count of Perche (1045-1100)**

Geoffrey III, young and vigorous (he would be less than 21 at the time of the Battle of Hastings) , accompanies William "the Bastard" (Duke of Normandy) on his conquest of England in 1066, a rather surprising turn of events. This appears to be the period of changing alliances, as the House of Rotrou has been as constant war with the Normans for more than 100 years. Two of his brothers, Rotrou and

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<sup>13</sup> K Thompson - Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France - County of the Perche (1000-1226) (P.45)

<sup>14</sup> Bry de la Clergerie - "Histoire des pays et Comte du Perche ...." perpetrates this idea, clearly false, probably because of his partisan attitude towards his native town, Bellême.

<sup>15</sup> Practically unheard of, as the King of England actually pays one of his vassals to side with him, to help solve his burgeoning problems in France.



Foulques, appear to have accompanied him <sup>16</sup>. Little information is available about what happened in England concerning the Rotrou family, after the Conquest, but we will build a reasonable picture in another document.

Geoffrey III helped William with money and troops, and apparently did not stay in England for very long. It is likely that he returned to his titles and his lands in France quite soon after the Conquest (1066), with suitable financial rewards. William himself returned to France six months after the battle of Hastings, and Geoffrey was apparently with him. It must be remembered that the Norman Conquest did not subdue the whole of England and Wales overnight. It took until about 1076 to finalize the Conquest. Geoffrey II supposedly was richly rewarded by William, however, no traces of land were apparent in the Domesday book (1086) <sup>17</sup>, compiled under orders of William, and the most complete record of wealth attribution ever to be made in England. It is probable that Geoffrey was paid in booty from the early part of the Conquest in Southern England during 1066-1077. The Rotrou family at that period apparently had easy access to liquid cash, and this probably came from tolls on the roads through Nogent-le-Rotrou and also the rewards from the Conquest.

Throughout his life, Geoffrey slowly but surely builds up the reputation of the House of Rotrou. He appears to shun the potential of the new power brought upon by Guillaume (many flock to stand in line for handouts), and concentrates on his titles and lands in France. Probably the most important indication of his increasing power is shown by his marriage to Beatrix de Montdidier de Roucy, from a family far away from the seat of power of the House of Rotrou, which shows the increasing notoriety of the Rotrou family. Felicia de Roucy, Beatrix's sister later marries Sancho Ramirez, King of Aragon, possibly opening, even at this early date, communications with high-born Spanish families. Geoffreys monastic patronage was to leave its mark in his lifes work, and he is also called upon to arbitrate local disputes, proof of his growing reputation. For reasons not clearly known, Geoffrey and Gilbert de l'Aigle became somewhat enemies. Geoffrey adroitly offers the hand of his daughter Julienne to Gilbert, and the two families were from this day, friends and allies. Although Geoffrey will not live to see it, the daughter of this union, Margaret de l'Aigle will marry Garcia Ramirez, King of Navarre, consolidating connections to Spain that Rotrou III, Geoffreys son will exploit to the full some years later. Geoffreys other daughters all marry into well-known families. Mathilde marries Raymond I de Turenne <sup>18</sup>, Maude marries Robert

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<sup>16</sup> Their presence at the Conquest goes completely unnoticed, as Geoffrey is the only one quoted in official documents of the day. However, some of the De Nogent family stay in England, and settle there for more than 100 years, before moving on to Ireland.

<sup>17</sup> Orderic Vitalis speaks about the great rewards lavished upon Geoffrey, but no trace of land in England is evident, when the Domesday book is completed in 1086. Either Geoffrey rapidly liquidated his assets in England, or else benefits from more "liquid" rewards, for his participation in the Conquest. Of the presence of Geoffrey's brothers in the Conquest, there is no trace. We must note however, that the Domesday book does not include data from London and Winchester, where Geoffrey was reputed to have held land.

<sup>18</sup> Mathilde's great grand-daughter, Isabelle de Taillefer, will marry John Lackland, King of England, many years later.

de Lacy, strengthening ties with the de Lacy family, and Marguerite marries Henry de Beaumont, the Earl of Warwick. Geoffrey apparently begins to define himself Count of Perche at this early date, which is rather unjustified, as Belleme will not be recovered by the Rotrou family for some time. He also demonstrates his power by minting money, although it is used only by the upper classes. Few of these coins exist today.

Geoffrey sees his son Rotrou off to the Crusades, but falls ill and dies in late 1099 or early 1100, after putting his affairs in order, and leaving his wife Beatrix to keep an eye on her sons estates <sup>19</sup>. Without a doubt, Geoffrey and his son Rotrou III will greatly expand the power and reputation of the House of Rotrou, reaching into royal families of three countries, England, Spain and Sicily.

### **Rotrou III (The Great) 2nd Count of Perche (1078-1144)**

Whatever number assigned to him, this Rotrou was given the sobriquet "The Great", and appears to have amply deserved it. His exact date of birth is unknown <sup>20</sup>, but he was present in Spain to aid his Uncle Sanchez in his war against the Moors (1093-1094), and he appears to have been about 16 years old. He participates in the First Crusade (1096-1099) where he distinguishes himself with his bravery. According to the "Chanson d'Antioch" <sup>21</sup>, Rotrou is noted as being one of the first to succeed in breaching the wall, and taking the city. Some of his soldiers had contracted leprosy in these foreign lands, and Rotrou opens a Leprosy House to ensure that they were cared for. This gesture was one of the many acts of generosity, piety and nobility that he was to show throughout his life.

In an early marriage, he has a daughter Beatrix, but nothing is known about this first wife, which probably ends with her early death. In 1100 he becomes the successor to his father Geoffrey. For some time he sides with Robert, the Duke of Normandy, loses a battle against Robert de Bellême, and changes his alliance, this time to side with Henry I of England. Showing all the signs of a man of progress, and a builder to a better level of civilisation, he was certainly a man in advance of his time. He began to try and raise the serfs of his domains from the total abjection that they suffered with respect to free men. So taken with such pacifist occupations, Rotrou was not present at the important battle of Tinchebrai (1106), where for the first time, the majority of knights were obliged to dismount and fight on firm ground. Henry, King of England captured Robert, Duke of Normandy, and carried him off to England where he later died in captivity. Robert de Belleme barely escaped with his life. During this period, however, the relationship between Rotrou and Henry was building into a firm friendship, and

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<sup>19</sup> The laws of the period guarantee the state of "non-belligerence" to anybody who goes to the Crusades, thus Rotrous' lands and titles are considered safe.

<sup>20</sup> Estimations of his date of birth range from 1075 to 1089. However, When Rotrous father (Geoffrey II) died, he was too young to become Count, and his new step-father, Robert I de Dreux, was nominated interim Count of Perche. This must place Rotrous birth close to 1080 (he was less than 18 when his father died in 1100)

<sup>21</sup> A poem about the seige of Antioch in 1098, where the story of the Crusade is told in 9000 verses.

Rotrou was certainly relieved of constant friction with the house of Belleme. He marries Mathilda, the illegitimate daughter of Henry <sup>22</sup>, and from this moment, he will become an ally and a close friend of Henry. Rotrou meets Bernard de Cluny, and develops a deep veneration for this monk. He cedes to Bernard of Cluny, an Oratory <sup>23</sup>, at Arcisse, near to Nogent. As Bernard wishes to found a monastery,, Rotrou cedes a domain at Tyron, and contributes to the building of a simple chapel, which will become widely known in the future as the Abbey of Tyron. In 1111, Rotrou takes up arms against the King of France, the Count of Anjou and the Lord of Bellême. He is captured, and the town of Mortagne-au-Perche is totally destroyed. However, contrary to accounts by several historians, he is only under House Arrest, and explains his feelings and his situation in two long letters which have been passed down to us today. He is released when King Henry captures Robert of Bellême in November of 1112. Bellême falls into the hands of Henry, who cedes it to Rotrou, while keeping control of the castle. As soon as he is freed by Henry, Rotrou immediately returns to Spain, supporting Alphonse King of Aragon who is facing local revolutionaries, but is obliged to return home in haste when the Perche is threatened by Guillaume III of Perche-Gouet. When local problems are solved, in 1115 he returns to Spain for a long period, to help Alphonse recover the Kingdom of Navarre. Rotrou is now openly known as Count of Perche, although, like his father before him, the title was prematurely self-attributed, before gaining control of Bellême. Alphonse wisely divides up the town into three distinct areas, Musselman, Jewish and Catholic, each with its own customs and jurisdiction. Tudela lives for many years in relative calm and the highly respected Rotrou is given the lordship of the town.

In November, 1120, Rotrou's wife Mathilda is drowned in the sinking of the White Ship, together with several hundred high-ranking nobles. Rotrou swears that he will never marry again, but in 1125, without a male heir, he changes his mind, and marries the high-born Hawise of Salisbury, thus bringing into his control considerable lands in England. They will have two sons, Rotrou IV and Geoffrey, and so the family succession is assured. In 1130, he returns to Spain where after several battles he is attested as ruler of Tudela, showing the importance of his

In 1135, King Henry dies, with his faithful ally Rotrou at his bedside. Henry's nephew Stephen manages to secure the throne of England in detriment to Mathilda, Henry's daughter. Rotrou, because of his powerful position, now may choose his alliances freely, and decide to support Stephen, possibly weighing the advantage of maintaining his estates in England. However, he eventually sides with Count Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, husband of Mathilda. He participates in the siege of Rouen, even though he is probably close to sixty years old. Rotrou dies soon after the siege, possibly as a result of being wounded.

Rotrou leaves the County of the Perche at the height of its power, a stable financial situation from his estates in England, and a reputation as a formidable

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<sup>22</sup> For his new wife's dowry, he receives two manors in Wiltshire, Aldebourne and Wanborough. Thus begins the building of considerable wealth in England, held by the family until the death of the last Count of Perche in 1226.

<sup>23</sup> "Oratoire" in French can be translated literally as an Oratory. However, it can also be a wayside shrine.

warrior, both from his battles in France and Spain, and his successes in the Crusades. His links with the English monarchy confer upon him a reputation that the family will benefit from for several generations.

### **Rotrou IV 3rd Count of Perche (1125-1191)**

The relations between the House of Rotrou and the House of Blois have dissipated over the past generations, mainly because of the rise in power of the Rotrou family, and their new affiliations with royalty. The marriage of Rotrou IV to Mathilda de Blois, daughter of Count Thibault, renews ties with the family that were largely responsible for the initial ascension of the Rotrou family. It also shows a restructuring of the links between the important families of the area, against threats from outside. In 1158, Rotrou finally recovers complete control of Bellême that has only been partially given to the family in 1114. His marriage to Mathilda, bolsters his reputation in many new ventures, but his alliance with the King of France brings him into conflict with Henry II of England, which is rather unfortunate, for Rotrou's estates in England are threatened. Rotrou later appears to have practiced a double policy of playing to both the English and French kings. From about 1170, Rotrou's relations with the English court become more dense. Rotrou's brother Geoffrey is certainly a part of this close relationship, for he is often in the company of King Henry. Geoffrey also seems to have taken in hand the estates of the family in England, until his death in 1180. During all these years, Rotrou continues in the family practice of substantial donations to religious houses, perhaps made possible by the financial resources of the English estates.

Henry dies in 1189, and his successor Richard (the Lion-Heart) immediately begins to make plans for his participation in the Third Crusade. Rotrou and his eldest son Geoffrey are profoundly associated with this project, and leave for the Crusades late in 1190, arriving in Acre with King Philip of France, in April 1191. Little is known about how Rotrou dies, but it is likely that he is wounded during the siege of Acre, and dies some time later.

### **Geoffrey IV de Perche - 4th Count of Perche (1158-1202)**

Geoffrey is the eldest of five brothers. The accession of Richard to the throne of England is followed almost immediately by the marriage of Geoffrey to Mathilda of Saxony, Richard's niece in 1189. This situation consolidates even more substantially, the relationship between the House of Rotrou and the English Crown, and brings into the House of Rotrou, the considerable wealth of Mathilda's estates in England. Geoffrey participates in the Third Crusade at the same time as his father. He revises his position in his alliance with Richard of England (perhaps an error). He is in a difficult position Richard is captured and held prisoner by the Holy Roman Emperor. Affairs stagnate for some time, suggesting that Geoffrey realign his alliances, which he does. Unfortunately, Richard, when he was released, showed his displeasure of Geoffrey, by confiscating his lands in England. Richard's displeasure was oriented towards Geoffrey, and not to his wife Mathilda<sup>24</sup>. The availability of the English estates are becoming a vital factor in the

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<sup>24</sup> K. Thompson - Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France - County of the Perche (1000-1226) (P.118). Richard's displeasure is short-lived. He needs allies, and so he forgives Geoffrey, and re-estates his land in England.

future choices of the Rotrou family. They bring into the Rotrou coffers, a valuable contribution to the financial situation of the House of Rotrou. Any mistakes in alliances are immediately sanctioned in the pipe-rolls<sup>25</sup> of the English state. Geoffrey was obliged to tread carefully in order to maintain his lands in France and England.

The political situation was changing the rules of the game. The French state was becoming more powerful, and had to be considered. The English state had interests in both France and England, and English monarchs did not hesitate to play their alliances against cessations to any "allies" (obviously of Norman descent or affiliation). Situations could change in the twinkling of an eye, as the House of Rotrou was to find out. The political acumen of the descendants of the original Rotrou was pushed to its limit in this troubled period. Any mistakes concerning their alliances could be fatal.

However, Geoffrey continues in the family manner to make religious benefactions, arbitrate in family disputes and authorise property transfers<sup>26</sup>. The death of King Richard in 1199 promotes confusion, and incites new alliances, but Geoffreys estates in England appear protected in the pipe-rolls, implying an immediate alliance between King John and Geoffrey. Geoffrey was present several times in Johns court over the next few years, and John increased the subsidies to Geoffrey concerning the English estates, suggesting a perfect agreement between the two. After 1200, the call to the fourth crusade by Pope Innocent III is heard by Geoffrey, but during the preparations for the departure, Geoffrey is suddenly taken ill, and dies in March, 1202. His son Thomas will become Count of Perche, in an environment full of danger for the House of Rotrou, terminating in its disappearance within the next twenty years.

### **Thomas de Perche - 5th Count of Perche (1194-1217)**

Thomas is only seven when his father dies, and it is his mother Mathilda who takes the affairs of the Perche in hand. However, after a suitable mourning period she marries again, to Enguerrand III de Coucy, one of the most ambitious counts of the time. Enguerrand theoretically becomes Count of Perche because of his marriage, but Thomas seems to have had no desire to wait until the traditional age of 20 to take in hand the affairs of his father. From the death of her husband, Mathilda, together with her son, makes many contributions to religious orders. Although Thomas was mentioned only as a witness to his mothers early donations, he began to assert his authority when he was barely sixteen. From such an early age, Thomas will commit himself to the hazards of war, without doubting that, from the start, however glorious his exploits will be, they only signal

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<sup>25</sup> Pipe-Roll - A collection of financial records maintained by the English Exchequer, showing the debts and disbursements owed to the Crown. A study of the Pipe-Roll documents of this time clarifies the level of "pleasure" or "displeasure" held by the Crown towards the nobles of all nationalities who held lands in England, and who used all possible means to stay in the King's favour. Because the English King also had power in France, some estates in France were also in the balance.

<sup>26</sup> K. Thompson - Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France - County of the Perche (1000-1226) (P.124)

his early death <sup>27</sup>. Although young, he was chivalrous, and answered the call of the King of France in his rivalry with the Kings of England and Germany. The battle of Bouvines, in which Thomas and his vassals participated was important in more ways than one. The English and the German armies were defeated, and as a result the young French state was enhanced by confirming sovereignty over Brittany and Normandy. King John returned to England, and was obliged to sign the Magna Carta, the basic establishment of English Common Law.

After the death of his mother, Thomas continues, now in his own name, to make generous donations to religious houses. He follows King Louis to England, and is killed at the siege of Lincoln, on May 12th, 1217 <sup>28</sup>. The direct line of descent of the Counts of Perche is terminated, and the House of Rotrou (in France) is doomed to extinction. Certain historians ascertain that Thomas was married to a certain Helisende de Rethel, and that a son, also called Thomas existed. However, it is the uncle of Thomas, Guillaume, who becomes Count of Perche.

### **Thomas de Perche and Chartres Cathedral**

The relations between the house of Blois and Chartres and the House of Rotrou have always been very close. The first Count of Blois and Chartres, Thibault the Trickster, designated Rotrou, the first of our House of Rotrou, to build fortifications at the small town of Nogent-le Châtel, beginning the long line of the House of Rotrou.

To celebrate this long friendship, Count Thomas offers a panel in the window of Chartres Cathedral to Count Theobald VI of Chartres. This window was given in commemoration of his gift of a piece of land planted with grape vines, to a religious establishment at the request of Count Thomas.




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<sup>27</sup> M.O. Des Murs - Histoire des Comtes de Perche : De la Famille des Rotrous - 1856 (P.566) - "Il ne se doutait pas que son début, si glorieux qu'il pût être, serait pour lui le signal d'une mort anticipée."

<sup>28</sup> As a result of a fatal error of strategy, Thomas' group of soldiers is surrounded, and Thomas is killed, probably by Guillaume le Maréchal, by a lance thrust which pierces his visor.

## Guillaume de Perche - 6th Count of Perche (1164-1226)

Guillaume de Perche is one of the four sons of Rotrou, 3rd Count of Perche. His elder brother Geoffrey (1158-1202) becomes Count of Perche on the death of his father Rotrou III in 1191. Geoffreys' son Thomas naturally becomes Count of Perche upon the death of his father, and no one could suppose at this moment that the House of Rotrou is doomed. Thomas, ordered to set siege to Lincoln by the Louis, King of France who at the same time is setting siege to Dover, is killed at Lincoln in 1217. Guillaume, his uncle, is a man of the cloth (Bishop of Chalons-sur-Saône), and is abruptly brought into news when his nephew Thomas is killed. History seems to have ignored the illegitimate son of Thomas who apparently lived in London, and endows the title of Count of Perche to a man that can not possibly propagate it. Guillaume dies in 1226, and as he has no descendants, leaves the King of France (Louis IX) to apply the Law of Reversion, and to confiscate the lands and titles of this powerful family. Louis allocates the title of Countess of Perche to his mother, Blanche de Castille, which may seem a little out of line, unless we consider that Blanche was the cousin of John Lackland, King of England, who married Isabelle de Taillefer, who was a distant cousin of Thomas. The county of the Perche stays in the family, although the connection is, to say the least, very tenuous.

And so, after nearly 300 years of glory, the French House of Rotrou fades into the darkness. We are left with with several major family lines, the first in France, as Rotrou de Montfort establishes a descendance which will eventually reach Winston Churchill and Diana Spencer <sup>29</sup>, and the second which will settle in England for nearly a century, before going to Ireland and starting the Nugent line as we know it today. This line will descend across the centuries, to today's British monarchy <sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> We have two totally independent lines of descent to the Spencer-Churchill family, the first from Isabelle de Taillefer (1186-1246), and the second from Rotrou de Montfort (1048-1108).

<sup>30</sup> An Irish line will give us Mabel Nugent (1575-1610) which will descend through the Wellesley family (Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), and down to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth ..... and William, the future King of England !

## Appendix

List of works referenced in my thumbnail sketches of the Viscounts and Counts of the Rotrou Family :

- 1 - M. O. Des Murs  
Histoire des Comtes de Perche : De la Famille des Rotrous - 1856
- 2 - Vicomte de Romanet  
Géographie du Perche et Chronologie de ses Comtes - 1902
- 3 - Kathleen Thompson  
Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France : County of the Perche (1000-1226) - 2002
- 4 - Orderic Vitalis  
An English monk of Saint-Evroult in Normandy, a historian who in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, left one of the fullest and most graphic accounts of Anglo-Norman society in his own day. His works have been translated by Marjorie Chibnall.

In addition, I must include a vital document contained in a *Prosopon*<sup>31</sup> Newsletter of 1999 by Christian Settipani. He analyses the limited cartulary documents available in the 10th to 12th centuries, concerning the Viscounts of Châteaudun.

- 5 - Les Vicomtes de Châteaudun et leurs Alliés – Christian Settipani – 1999.

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<sup>31</sup> *Prosopon* – The Journal of Prosopography – edited by K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, Oxford University. Prosopography is an investigation of the common characteristics of a historical group, whose individual biographies may be largely untraceable, and is clearly established as an important approach in historical research.