

Prologue - 10th Century France

The tenth century marks the beginning of the Medieval Warm Period, a time of unusually warm climate in the North Atlantic region.

While some Vikings were establishing themselves in Britain and Ireland, another group did the same in the coastal region of France, around the mouth of the river Seine. In effect, the Vikings in this region allowed themselves to be bought off by the King of France. These Vikings had quite a bit of leverage. Beginning in 896 they had sailed up the Seine and laid siege to Paris several times and were constantly expanding the area they pillaged. The French kings, even Charlemagne, were unable to stop the plundering. When the French noted the increasing number of Viking settlements along the coast, they feared the worst. But the Vikings were wearying of the raids. French defenses were becoming more effective and Viking losses were increasing. So a deal was struck in 912. The French would recognize the Viking possessions of the land they had already settled (plus a bit more) and make the Viking leader, one Rollo, a French noble. In return, the Viking duke would convert to Christianity, acknowledge the French king as his overlord and, protect France against wilder Vikings. Thus was born Normandy.

The Treaty of St. Clair-sur-Epte establishes the Duchy of Normandy. Rollo the Viking (Gange-Rolv Ragnvaldsson, or Hrolf the Ganger) becomes France's first duc d'Orléans as the Scandinavian Norsemen extend their domination over the Franks. Now aged about 51, Rollo will be baptized next year, taking the name Robert, and will acquire large parts of what later will be called Normandy.

Rollo died at Rouen at about 85 years old, having been France's first duc d'Orléans. He turned over governance of his dukedom 4 years previously to his son William I Longsword, then about 38, who had married Sprota de Bretagne and become 2nd duke of Normandy.

931 A.D.: political events

Hugh of Provence cedes Provence to Burgundy's Rudolf II in return for Rudolf's renunciation of all claims to Italy (year approximate; see 926 A.D.). He makes his son Lothair II co-ruler of Provence.

936 - 954 A.D.: political events

Rudolf I of Burgundy dies in mid-January at Auxerre, France, after a 24-year reign in which he ruled Italy from 922 to 926 and united Burgundy. He is succeeded as king of France by a 14-year-old son of the late Charles III (the Simple), whose second wife, Eadgifu, was a daughter of England's Edward I (she fled with the boy to Wessex after the imprisonment of Charles in 922). A nephew of the late Danish leader Aethelstan (Guthrum), the boy is chosen king by the 39-year-old count of Paris Hugh the Great, whose father, Robert, was killed at Soissons in 923. He is consecrated at Laon June 19 and will reign until 954 as Louis IV d'Outremer (from Overseas)

The main rival to the Carolingian kings in Francia Occidentalis is the family of Robert the Strong. Count of extensive territories around the Loire, he plays a leading part in the struggle against the Normans. His son, Eudes, adds Paris to his feudal domains and defends it successfully in 885-6 against a Norman siege.

When the west Frankish king dies in 888, the nobles elect Eudes in his place instead of a member of the Carolingian dynasty. Subsequently the crown returns to Carolingian monarchs, but by the mid-10th century they rule only with the support of the descendants of Robert the Strong. One of them, Hugh the Great, exemplifies the nature of a great nobleman's power base.

Part of Hugh's strength derives directly from his feudal lands; he is count of Paris, with large territories between the Seine and the Loire. He also acquires a title of romantic resonance, capable of inspiring a special kind of loyalty; from 937 he is called 'Duke of the Franks'. And he has useful brothers-in-law; his first wife is sister of an Anglo-Saxon king of England, his second is sister of the emperor Otto I.

More surprisingly, Hugh is the lay abbot of at least four great monasteries, bringing him considerable wealth and a voice in the vast network of Benedictines. This astonishing portfolio, as early as the 10th century, reveals the peculiar blend of secular and religious power in European feudalism.

At different periods Hugh supports and opposes the Carolingian dynasty in the west Frankish kingdom, depending on where he considers the best interest of his own family to lie. When he dies in 956, succeeded by three sons, he has considerably extended his territory around Paris and has secured the Duchy of Burgundy for his descendants.

954 A.D.: political events

France's Louis IV dies September 10 at age 33 and is succeeded by his 13-year-old son Lothair, who will reign until 986, initially under the guardianship of Hugh the Great, count of Paris, and later under his maternal uncle Bruno, Archbishop of Cologne.

Lothair finds his closest enemies to be across the border in Normandy. The warring Normans, directly descended from an even more violent Viking tribe, harass peaceful merchants and farmers across the border into l'Île de France. He summons the Count of Blois and Chartres, a certain Thibault, to take the problem in hand. The solutions applied to the Kings problems at this time are far-reaching in the eventual emergence of the House of Rotrou.

956 A.D.: political events

Hugh the Great, count of Paris, declares himself effective master of Burgundy in mid-April but dies at Dourdan June 17 at age 59 (approximate). He is succeeded by his 18-year-old son Hugh Capet, who is recognized with some reluctance as Duke of the Franks by his cousin Lothair IV, King of the Franks.

967 A.D.: political events

Lothair IV of the Franks dies March 2 at age 44, after a 32-year reign and is succeeded by his 19-year-old son, who will reign briefly as Louis V (le Fainéant), embroiling the Carolingians with Adalberon, Archbishop of Reims, and Hugh Capet.

Emma, Queen of Franks was the queen consort. She was married to Lothaire, King of the Franks. Mother of King Louis V of the Franks, After his death, Hugh Capet succeeded to the throne, ending the Carolingian dynasty and beginning the Capetian.

986 A.D.: political events

LOUIS V. (967-987), King of France, succeeded his father Lothair in March 986 at the age of nineteen, and finally embroiled the Carolingian dynasty with Hugh Capet and Adalberon, archbishop of Reims. From the absence of any important event in his one year's reign the medieval chroniclers designated him by the words "qui nihil fecit," i.e. "le Faineant" or "he who did nothing." He married Adelaide, sister of Geoffrey Grisegonelle, count of Anjou, but had no issue. His heir by blood was Charles, Duke of Lower Lorraine, son of Louis IV, but the defection of the bishops and the treason of Adalberon (Ascelinus), bishop of Laon, assured the success of Hugh Capet.

987 A.D.: political events

France's Louis V dies in May, and it is alleged that his mother, Emma, poisoned him. His death at age 20 ends the Carolingian dynasty founded by Charlemagne in 800, and the Capetian dynasty that will rule until 1328 comes to power. The archbishop of Reims declares that the Frankish monarchy is elective rather than hereditary, denies the claims of the late King's uncle Charles, duke of Lower Lorraine, and engineers the election of his friend Hugh. His nickname, because of the *capa* or 'cape' which he wears, is Hugh Capet.

996 A.D. : political events

France's Hugh Capet dies at Paris October 14 at age 58 and is succeeded by his son, Robert, who will reign until 1031 as Robert II.

The acquisitions of the second Duke of Normandy, William I (Longsword; 927–942), were threatened when he was murdered by Arnulf I of Flanders in 942. It was only in the reign of his son Richard I (942–996) that something like administrative continuity based on succession to fiscal domains and control of the church was achieved. The dukes (as they then came to be styled) allied with the ascendant duke Hugh Capet, had little to lose from the latter's accession to the kingship in 987.

The choice of Hugh Capet as king in 987 is the moment at which the western half of the empire of the Franks unmistakably becomes France. The Capetian dynasty will last until 1328. The monarchy asserts its new power over feudal lords.

In the beginning, the Capetians only ruled the area around Paris and Orleans. They soon progressed with reuniting other parts of the kingdom and took over many parts of what today is known as France. The Capetians found the royal château which remains a favourite residence of the kings of France until the Renaissance.

About the middle of the 10th century, the name of Thibault I is recorded as the Count of Blois. He was the founder of a family which remained in power until 1230. Blois became the most important town in the region. The first stone castle was built to protect the town dates back to that period. An independent bastion surrounded the castle, and followed the line of the headland on which it was erected. The numerous medieval remains still exist.

In the influential sphere of the House of Blois and Chartres, and especially the House of Châteaudun, a previously unknown "**Rotrocus**" has already made his appearance We will call him Rotrou I.

You are now ready for the beginning of the story concerning the De Nogent dynasty.