

Rotrou de Nogent

Nothing is more frustrating than trying to piece together minute fragments of information, in order to make a story. It is like possessing only a handful of the 1000 pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, in order to establish a picture. Imagine how it becomes even more difficult, if, in the best of faith, somebody adds to the pile of pieces, some from another picture. We must try and insert these pieces into a picture where they do not belong, and possibly, we may make some of them fit, thus producing an even more confusing situation. With the family which we will call "De Nogent", who emerged from the shadows, into the light of the Xth century, the situation is identical. In order to have any chance of constructing the truth about the first ancestors of our illustrious family, we must be patient, diligent and ruthless. Imagine, for a moment, our research into members of the family in the XIth century. The family has prospered, married into royalty, become famous ! They donate to charities of the era, and these donations are carefully noted for posterity. Nobility, even if they cannot read or write, surrounds itself with scribes of one form or another, either counting on the clergy to note their benefaction, or associating themselves with "Sénéchals" ¹, who as well as administrating his lords domain, noted all important events. These Sénéchals gave an aura of respectability and legal proof (this is called Cartulary evidence) to the major events of the life of such nobility.

However, the first evidence of a minor family, as it becomes known in the IXth and Xth centuries is another problem. Nobody is there to record their appearance, their lives, and the impact they leave on the environment of their time. For the "De Nogent" family, we must examine minutely all possible information, and classify it into three areas :

1 - Information which comes from documentary proof, written at the time the event actually took place. Historians, such as Orderic Vitalis (1075-1143), who were alive during this foggy period, noted the major events of the time, especially if it centred around senior nobility, or of royalty. However, to merit a mention in the annals of such historians, newcomers had to clearly impinge upon the nobility and royalty of that period. This documentary proof can also come from what can loosely be described as "The Church", where the only people who knew how to read and write were to be found. This Cartulary Evidence is essential to us in our quest, supposing, of course, that the newcomers were pious enough to make donations of some kind, or that they were close enough to nobility to merit a mention in the official charters of the time.

2 - Information which comes from historians from a later period. The historians of the XVIth and XVIIth centuries have provided us with valuable information. They could inspect documentary proof from a period which was not too distant, and leave a written trace of what they found, for future generations. Authors such as René

¹ Originally defined as being responsible for the supervision of a noble household, a sénéchal's functions often developed into ensuring administrative functions for all important events concerning his master. Sometimes, he was also responsible for military decisions, although later, this task was attributed to a new function, held by a maréchal

Courtin (c1570-c1635), Bry de la Clergerie (1590-1659) come into this category, although the latter appears to copy wholesale from the book by René Courtin. However, we must be careful not to allow too much credence to these historians, as they too, were referring to the obscurity of the Xth century, and could easily be tempted into inferring events which can not be proved. Some even let their partisan attitude overwhelm the available cartulary facts.

3 - Information which comes from more recent historians. The XVIIIth and XIXth centuries provided us with a flurry of historians and genealogists, eager to develop family histories back into the middle ages. Such authors as M.O. des Meurs, the Vicomte de Romanet (1859-1936), and others, who were closely associated with the Perche, were examples of historians of that time ². The much renowned John Burke, famous for his treatises concerning Peerage and Landed Gentry, have brought the middle ages directly into today's dining rooms.

4 - Information which comes from today's genealogists and historians. A new science called prosopography ³ has allowed minute but associated fragments of history to be collected into electronic data-bases, and analysed. Such people as Katharine Keats-Rohan, Kathleen Thompson, who apparently wrote her thesis on the County of the Perche, and Christian Settiani, of the Sorbonne, whose documents concerning the Viscounts of Châteaudun are vitally important to us, have made their analyses, and left their conclusions about the emerging families of the IXth to XIIth centuries. We can say with some truth that the more modern genealogists have been more ruthless in their analyses, setting aside previous partisan judgements, and focussing only on the cartulary evidence which is available. These analyses can leave gaping holes in the lives of the studied individuals, but the results of their studies can rarely be contested, because they are based upon official documents of the period.

5 - Lastly, the wealth of information that can be found on the Internet, building family trees of varied dimensions, and sometimes of doubtful content, completes our informational data bases. Unfortunately, it is here that the errors can propagate to the furthest ends of the earth, as a completely erroneous piece of information, often a date, sometimes a name, even an event, can be copied "willy-nilly", from one site to another, without the slightest effort to investigate the source of information, or its veracity. One such document, to be found on nearly all the Nugent sites, asserts that de Nugent family were of Norman descent, and that they can be traced back to Evas de Bellême, a powerful Baron of the Xth century. Where did this information initially come from ?

The first strong assertions that the Nugents are of Norman descent appear in a book called " Histoire des Pays et Comté du Perche" by Bry de la Clergerie, around

² To help us in our arguments concerning the origins of the De Nogent family, we refer to translations of parts of the book by [O.E. Des Murs](#).

³ In the words of prosopographer [Katherine Keats-Rohan](#), "prosopography is about what the analysis of the sum of data about many individuals can tell us about the different types of connection between them, and hence about how they operated within and upon the institutions—social, political, legal, economic, intellectual—of their time."

1620. Bry was from the region of Bellême, and strongly suggested that the Rotrou family descended directly from the Bellêmois family. This information was propagated by John Burke, a much respected genealogist, in his book "Peerage and Baronetage", around 1862. This information has been cut and pasted, without any research, into the many Nugent Internet sites on-line today.

It does not take much effort, nor much research, to discover that some important information is completely false, and yet is taken on face value by many of today's amateur "genealogists".

So - Where is the truth ?

The most important fact we know about the first known ancestor of the Nugents, a certain Rotrou, is that we don't know much about him at all ! In order to build a picture of this little known person, as he appears in the middle of the IXth Century, and to confer upon him the title of "First Of The House Of Rotrou", we must glean our information from several limited sources.

What we NOW know as false

In our conjectures about our first known Rotrou, we are not restricted to defining who he was, but allow ourselves to clarify who he certainly was not, as a certain number of inexactitudes are known to exist concerning the Rotrou family.

We may begin with one of the greatest genealogists of our time, John Burke (1814-1892). Burke clearly suggested that the Rotrou dynasty was descended from Yves de Creil, ancestor of the House of Bellême. We will treat the history of Yves de Creil in a separate document. It is obvious that Burke consulted books and other documents concerning the County of the Perche. However, he seems to have been seduced by the explanations of Bry-de-la-Clergerie, who consistently associates the Rotrou family with the House of Bellême. Bry was not a genealogist, but a mere lawyer, who lived in Bellême, and who contradicts himself often in his book " Histoire des Pays et Comté du Perche". Most historians agree that Bry-de-la-Clergerie unashamedly plagiarized a book by René Courtin, which unfortunately had little visibility. M.O. des Meurs, in a book written at about the same time, "Comtes de Perche de la Famille des Rotrous", considers that it is an insult to associate the villainous Bellême family, whose members more often died violent deaths (on a par with the "de Medicis" family), with the pious and noble House of Rotrou. We will not harbour upon these conflicting documents, but limit ourselves to evidence which can be proved.

What we NOW know as true

In about 963, The Count of Blois and Chartres, Thibault (920-978) waged war upon Richard Ist, Duke of Normandy, whose armies continually pillaged across the border of Normandy ⁴, into the fertile plains of l'Ile de France. The early Dukes of Normandy were direct descendants of the Vikings, and their attitude towards others had always been bellicious. In an effort to halt these incursions, Thibault, with the benediction of Lothaire, King of France, attacked and took Evreux, and entrusted one of his military commanders, a certain Rotrou (Rotroldus), hitherto unknown to history, to attack Sées. Rotrou succeeded in this task, but was globally defeated, and forced to cede the town of Bellême ⁵. Also in 963, Rotrou is cited as a witness to the foundation of the Priory of Bonneval, showing that he has some importance. Although little known at this time, Rotrou has sometimes been defined as the Count of Perche (although we have no indication as to how he gained the title). We have absolutely no information concerning his wife, not even her name. We are left to ponder upon the possible links between Rotrou and the Lords of Mortagne (Herve and Fulke), previously known as Corbon, and inheriting the title of Counts of Perche. Although he was forced to cede Bellême in the war against Robert I (indicating that at some time Bellême formed part of his domain), Rotrou continued to be referred to as the Count of Perche, indicating that the Bellêmois was never considered to be part of the Perche. Some time after the debacle against the Normans, Thibault ordered Rotrou to build fortified positions in the developing town of Nogent-le-Châtel (later to become Nogent-le-Rotrou), to keep an eye on the "troublesome neighbours, the Normans". We know that Thibault died in 978, and that he was succeeded by his son Eudes. We know also that Rotrou was a witness to Thibault's widow, Liegarde, in at least 5 cartulary acts, in 978, 985, 986, 988, and 991. This clearly defines Rotrou as a senior and trusted "*fidelis*", or "*faithful*". Before 996, Rotrou himself (named as *Rotroco de Nogiamo*) makes a donation to the church of land at Thivars. In the act, Rotrou describes himself as knight and vassal of Eudes, Count of Chartres, the son of Thibault ⁶. This act infers that the town of Nogent had already been ceded to Rotrou, either by Thibault, or his son, as a reward for his loyalty to the House of Chartres ⁷.

⁴ It must be admitted that, at this time, there was no clearly defined border of Normandy to the south, as the Dukes clearly had their eyes set upon expansion. We will have to wait until 1204 for the boundaries of Normandy to be solidly defined.

⁵ History is uncertain about the jurisdiction of Bellême in this period. Rotrou was supposed to have lost control of Bellême in the wars of 963-4, but we also know that Yves de Creil (930-1005) became Lord of Bellême. Apparently, Yves was nominated Lord of Bellême by Richard I, Duke of Normandy, **after** Rotrou lost it. "*Yves was known as a Kings Archer (Balistraris Regis), but in fact was among the Kings chosen few, and was considered as an engineer, a "builder" of machines. Thus Yves, of relatively low birth was raised to higher levels as a result of his art, by Richard*"

⁶ "But in 999 he was still only a proud man with great ambitions : "I, Rotrocos, given to worldly knighthood and devoted in fidelity to Count Odo" ("Begging Pardon and Favour" - The Sublimity of Knighthood - Page 257, by Geoffrey Koziol).

⁷ The Viscount de Romanet gives us several explanations : Sebastien Rouilliard indicates that the lands of Nogent will be ceded to Rotrou by Eudes I, in 980, lands which he had confiscated from the domains of Saint-Martin-du-Val. Michel Jean Ozeray indicates that Eudes I cedes part of the territories of the Abbey de St. Pere to a certain knight Rotroldus. However, the date is agreed. Why did the Count of Chartres wait until 980 to reward Rotrou ?

That he should appear in those acts gives more credibility to his station. An inferior noble would never appear in such acts, and their mere existence serve to announce the strong links that associated Rotrou with the House of Blois and Chartres. Rotrou, as a result of these links, received a probable "Thank You" for services rendered, when Rotrou's daughter, Melisende, married a younger brother of Hughes, the Viscount of Châteaudun (it may have been Geoffrey [963-1005]), or even a lesser known brother Fulkes, whose house already had strong connections with that of Blois and Chartres.⁸ We also know that a member of the Rotrou family, in the form of Geoffrey II of Mortagne, subsequently became Viscount of Châteaudun, thus supporting our proposition. Historians who were dubious about the accession of the Rotrou family to such a position questioned the lineage of Rotrou, supposing that he was of an inferior, or at least minor noble family. The subsequent events that allowed his lineage to become Viscounts of Châteaudun obviously plead for a more senior position of Rotrou, and much more privileged links with the House of Châteaudun, through the auspices of the Counts of Blois and Chartres.

From the moment they step into the limelight in the second half of the Xth century, the members of the House of Rotrou will never leave it, marrying into senior nobility and several royal families in their ascent to power and fortune.

So, in the light of all the preamble which warns us of incorrect or invalid data, let us lay down some dates and some facts, that can be contested with difficulty, concerning our first De Nogent, that of Rotrocus, or Rotrou.

0940 Probable birth of Rotrou, certainly in the Perche, where his family originated. We do not know the name of his father (it may have been Foulkes), and we have no positive information about his antecedents.

0963 As a chief of one of Thibault's (Count of Blois and Chartres) armies, Rotrou is defeated in a battle against the Normans, and "loses" control of the city of Bellême.

0965 Rotrou has a daughter called Melisende.

The conflicting evidence of two different dates of birth for Melisende (965 and 991), prompts us to assume with some degree of certainty, that there were two Melisendes, and that they were probably mother and daughter.

0975 (about) Rotrou builds fortifications at the town of Nogent-le-Châtel, to keep an eye on the troublesome Norman neighbours, and to protect the access into the rich plains of l'île de France.

0978 Rotrou is a witness to an act of Liegarde, wife of deceased Thibault I.

0985 Rotrou is a witness to an act of Liegarde, wife of deceased Thibault I.

⁸ The uncertainty concerning the relation between Geoffrey and Foulkes forms part of the enigma the descent of the Viscounts of Châteaudun, which we will discuss in a succeeding document.

0985 (about) Marriage of his daughter Melisende, into the House of Châteaudun. Was the marriage to Geoffrey, younger brother of Hughes, the Viscount of Châteaudun, or was it to Foulkes, another practically unknown relative ? Whichever event is true, Melisende's son Geoffrey (991-1039) becomes Viscount of Châteaudun, when his uncle Hugh becomes Archbishop of Tours in 1004, and is obliged to rescind his title of Viscount. Foulkes and Geoffrey must have died before this date, or else the elder of the two would have inherited the title.

0986 Rotrou is a witness to an act of Liegarde, wife of deceased Thibault I.

0988 Rotrou is a witness to an act of Liegarde, wife of deceased Thibault I.

0991 Rotrou is a witness to an act of Liegarde, wife of deceased Thibault I.

The contents of the five acts mentioned above are not important to our story. However, the fact that Rotrou is cited as a witness to these acts, proves him to be a long-standing follower (*fidelis*) of the House of Blois and Chartres, with a respected and important position.

0996 Continuing to show the importance of his position, Rotrou makes a donation of land at Thivars, to the Church. The cartulary act contains the reference "*I, Rotrocus, given to worldly knighthood, and devoted in fidelity to Count Odo*". This statement confirms that he recognized Eudes, Count of Blois and Chartres (as he had done with Eudes' father Thibault), as his liege, thus indicating the strong ties that he has with the House of Blois and Chartres. As these Counts are known to have authority over the Viscountancy of Châteaudun, it is likely that they were responsible for the ascending importance of Rotrou with respect to the House of Châteaudun.

1000 Probable death of Rotrou.

This is all we know about our first Rotrou de Nogent, a competent soldier, ambitious, loyal, pious, who laid the foundations of our Nugent family. We will hesitate to call him Rotrou I, a sobriquet added by future historians. However, he is without contest, the first of the famous "House of Rotrou".

Happily, now that he has stepped out of the shadows, we will be able to follow his descendants into power, fame and fortune.

Citations

1 - M. O. Des Murs - Comtes de Perche de la Famille des Rotrous (1856)

This is a translation from the French - Page 60 :

Although Bry had defined, when he began the Book of Genealogy, tables of the two families of Bellême and Mortagne, the notion of two distinct entities, giving preference of course, to the older House of Bellême, he nevertheless, in many parts of his book, tries to persuade us that the family of Rotrou is descended from that of Talvas, and that Rotrou I, who we consider to be the head of his race, was the younger brother of Yves, that Bry states was the head of the race of Talvas. This is pure conjecture. Although both Rotrou and Yves were contemporaries, there was never any connection between the two. Yves was, from the beginning of his career, only one of the crossbow-men of Louis, the King of France, and of Viking descent. The same author also states that, on the contrary, Rotrou was of noble descent, apparently holding the title of Count of Perche, and totally French.

2 - M. O. Des Murs - Comtes de Perche de la Famille des Rotrous (1856)

This is a translation from the French - Page 96 :

So we can say with confidence, that Rotrou was Count of the Perche up to (at least) 963, and from then on, although dispossessed of Bellême, continued to use the title of Count of Perche. If he did not justify the title of Count of Perche, he was, without contest, Count of the Corbonnais, which included nearly all the Perche.

(Note from the translator. This, in fact, was not true ! The area of the Perche known as the Corbonnais, with its centre as the town of Mortagne, covers significantly less than a half of the Perche.)

3 - L. Joseph Fret - P. 280 - Antiquités et Chroniques Percheronnes - Vol 1 - 1838.

We have a clearer idea of Yves de Bellême's rise to power

"Yves de Bellême rendit un important service au jeune Richard, premier du nom, troisième duc de Normandie; ce service fut à l'origine de sa puissance et de sa fortune".

"Yves de Bellême rendered an important service to the young prince Richard, first named, third duke of Normandy; this service being the origin of his [future] power and good fortune".

As a youth, Richard had been kidnapped by King Louis IV of France⁹, with the object of confiscating his heritage. Yves suggested a subterfuge whereby the child pretended to be ill, to the point of dying.

"...li enfant se fist malade par le conseil de Yves Osmond et chil qui le gardoient se désespoient de sa vie, si que la nouvelle fut espendue par Laon et toutes les gardes se départirent de l'enfant, Osmond ... print l'enfant devant li [à cheval], et s'en issy de la ville".

The child pretended to be ill, as counselled by Yves ... Osmond and those who cared for him feared for his life, such that the news was widely circulated ... and all the guards left the child alone, Osmond took the child with him [on horseback] , and fled from the town.

.... il [Yves] obtint dans la suite cette seigneurie [Bellême] par la generosité du Duc Richard, qui se rappela le service qu'Yves lui avait rendu durant sa captivité. En outre du Bellêmois, Richard donna encore à Yves, Alençon et ses terres la ville de Séez à la charge de lui faire hommage, et de veiller de ce côté à la sureté de ses états.

He [Yves] was later granted this Lordship [Bellême] by the generosity of Duke Richard, who ... remembered the service that Yves had rendered during his captivity. As well as the Bellêmois, Richard also gave to Yves, Alençon and its lands ... the town of Séez on condition that he paid homage, and that he should ensure the security of his [Richards] lands.

4 - M. O. Des Murs - Comtes de Perche de la Famille des Rotrous (1856)

This is a translation from the French - Page 106 :

Some historians propose that, to recompense Rotrou for his losses, and to reward him for his services, Thibault ceded to him Nogent-le-Châtel (later Nogent-le Rotrou), under the auspices of the County of Chartres, but obliged to do military service, thus obtaining a forward post totally devoted to preserving the lands from all possible attacks from Normandy.

⁹ In order to curb the bellicious pretensions of the Normans, the French King had found no other way to prevent this, than to kidnap the young Duke, and to keep him in restraint. The Dukes supporters found a way to free the imprisoned youth. History will show that the Kings of France would regret their policies towards the Norman Dukes. In 911, King Charles had signed a peace treaty with the Viking chief Rollo, allocating him enormous territories in the north of Neustria. This may be associated with the concept of letting the fox into the hen-house !