

## The Mélisende Hypotheses (The Enigma of Mélisende)

This chapter could have been entitled "The Enigma of Mélisende", and could lead the reader to believe that the only subject covered concerns this woman who was a key element of the House of Châteaudun at the end of the 10th century, and also a vital element of the emerging House of Rotrou, and yet who remains, to this day, much of an enigma. However, although we will attempt to clarify the genealogy of one of the most important early members of this family, we inevitably reach into some of the more tenuous and uncertain moments of this period. Our Mélisende clearly existed, but there are several possibilities concerning her connection with the House of Rotrou.

### Introduction

During the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, few people could read or write. Minor families or lineages had no way to record births, marriages and deaths within their families, and had probably more important things to do. Only forenames were given to each person when they were born, and imagination was sorely lacking in the attribution of these names. The children were often given the name of their mother or father. The names were used orally, and whenever, at a later date, these names may have been transcribed, the spelling was not necessarily precise. The invasion of England by William the Conqueror has done nothing to simplify the reconstruction of family events, as there were often English and French variants of the forenames used, and this problem is compounded by the fact that Latin was the only written source of information. As examples, the many Viscounts of Châteaudun are often called Geoffrey, although the Latin name used was Gausfred. The name Rotroldus, or Rotrou was given through several generations of the Perche family, but the Latin name used in documents of that time was Rotrocius.

Genealogists have discussed at length, the rise and fall of the several illustrious families in "The County of The Perche" between the 10th and the 12th centuries. It will suffice to say that this area of France harboured many of the key players in the power struggles ending in French unification. A cursory glance at the available written works will immediately uncover the obstacles encountered in the establishment of the lineage of the families concerned. The instantaneous availability of many Internet documents that discuss this period does nothing to clarify the situation, in fact, sometimes it only adds to the confusion. We are left with the idea "We know how it all ended, but we are not quite sure how it began".

"*The descent of the baronry <sup>1</sup> is obscure .....*" is only one of the understatements to be found in documents concerning this period of history.

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<sup>1</sup> This must surely refer to the Baronry of Delvin, County Westmeath, in Ireland, from 1200 to 1400, although we feel that the baronry of Ireland is fraught with much less uncertainty than the De Nogent period in England between 1066 and 1172.

While trying to fit a certain Mélisende de Châteaudun into this fascinating period in history, we will have to satisfy ourselves with uncertain dates, inconsistent names, unknown places, all this through a haze of Latin. Information will come from many different sources, and will be fragmentary to say the least ! We will raise questions that have uncertain answers, or no answer at all. When we reach the end of this chapter, we will have our finished jigsaw puzzle, but we will be missing several pieces, and even more frustrating, we will have pieces which don't belong to this picture at all. To make matters worse, we will have pieces which surely belong, but unfortunately, don't quite seem to fit !

From the several hypotheses developed concerning the House of Châteaudun, The House of Rotrou, the House of Bellême, and other major and minor actors of this period, and their interpenetration, I will leave you to choose the one you find the most convincing.

## Investigating the Uncertain

We know that a certain Mélisende de Châteaudun existed, and we know that she formed a small, though important part in the descent of the House of Rotrou. Who she was, and how she got her name (title) is not clear. She was born about either about 960 or 991 and died about 1035<sup>2</sup>.

In the various reconstructions that are given below, we attempt to clarify the following :

- 1 Who were the parents of " Mélisende " ?
- 2 Who did she marry ? (see the last section of this document)
- 3 How did she get the sobriquet "De Châteaudun " ?
- 4 Who were her children ?

If we can answer all the above questions, we will know how Mélisende fits into the family of the House of Rotrou. There are several possible reconstructions of the Family Tree, inserting the Mélisende in various places, and associating her directly or indirectly with the Rotrou family. We must first base our conjecture on information that we can be sure of :

- 1 A certain Viscount Geoffrey of Châteaudun and his wife Hermengarde had several sons,
- 2 One of these sons apparently married a certain Mélisende, probably the daughter of a certain Rotrou de Nogent.

Within the different reconstructions, we must always return to the the principal question which imposes itself : Why was Mélisende referred to as "de Châteaudun ". There are several possibilities :

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<sup>2</sup> The fact that we have reasonably clear evidence of two different dates of birth for Mélisende, gives weight to our final evaluation showing that there were not one but two women named Mélisende.

- 1 She was the daughter of a Viscount of Châteaudun. If she had a brother, he would inherit the title. If the brother died before Mélisende, she could then inherit the title and pass it to her husband, although this is unlikely, as it would normally go to one of their sons, or to another male of the family.
- 2 She married into the House of Châteaudun, perhaps even the Viscount, and thus her descendants were potential Viscounts,
- 3 She was given the "de Châteaudun " sobriquet much later, by historians or genealogists, either because she was a daughter of the House of Châteaudun, or that she married a Viscount of Châteaudun,
- 4 There were several persons called Mélisende, one of which was a Mélisende de Châteaudun.

However, before we concentrate on Mélisende, we have another discrepancy at the same period.

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 that of the Internet site FranceBalade, which appears to be a serious and knowledgable Internet source.

Title	Settipani FranceBalade	De Romanet	Thompson	De	Murs
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

Some historians suggest that Generation 1 and Generation 2 did not both exist (most generations had sons called Geoffrey and Hughes, causing potential confusion), and in fact represent only one generation. If we merge G1 and G2, we may possibly satisfy our quest for truth. Appearing in the midst of this turmoil, appeared a certain Mélisende. Was she the daughter of our first forbear, Rotrou, or was she the daughter of an early Viscount of Châteaudun?

All historical sources, however, agree that the second half of the Xth Century is clouded with uncertainty. Kathleen Thompson <sup>3</sup> freely admits that valid data concerning minor nobility at this time was difficult to find, but that knowledge concerning the descent of the Rotrou Family was better than most.

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<sup>3</sup> Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France - The County of the Perche (1000-1226).

Certain sources say that Mélisendes' father was Hughes de Châteaudun 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount (about 960-989).

- 1 - Vicomte De Romanet (1900)
- 2 - Kathleen Thompson (2002)
- 3 - FranceBalade (<http://www.francebalade.com/chartres/ctdunois.htm>)

Certain genealogists say it was Geoffrey de Châteaudun 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount (about 935-969)

- 1 - OE de Murs (1856)
- 2 - Christian Settapani (1999)

And finally, a strong current of thought suggests that Mélisende was the daughter of Rotrou, the commander of one of the armies of Thibault, Count of Blois and Chartres.

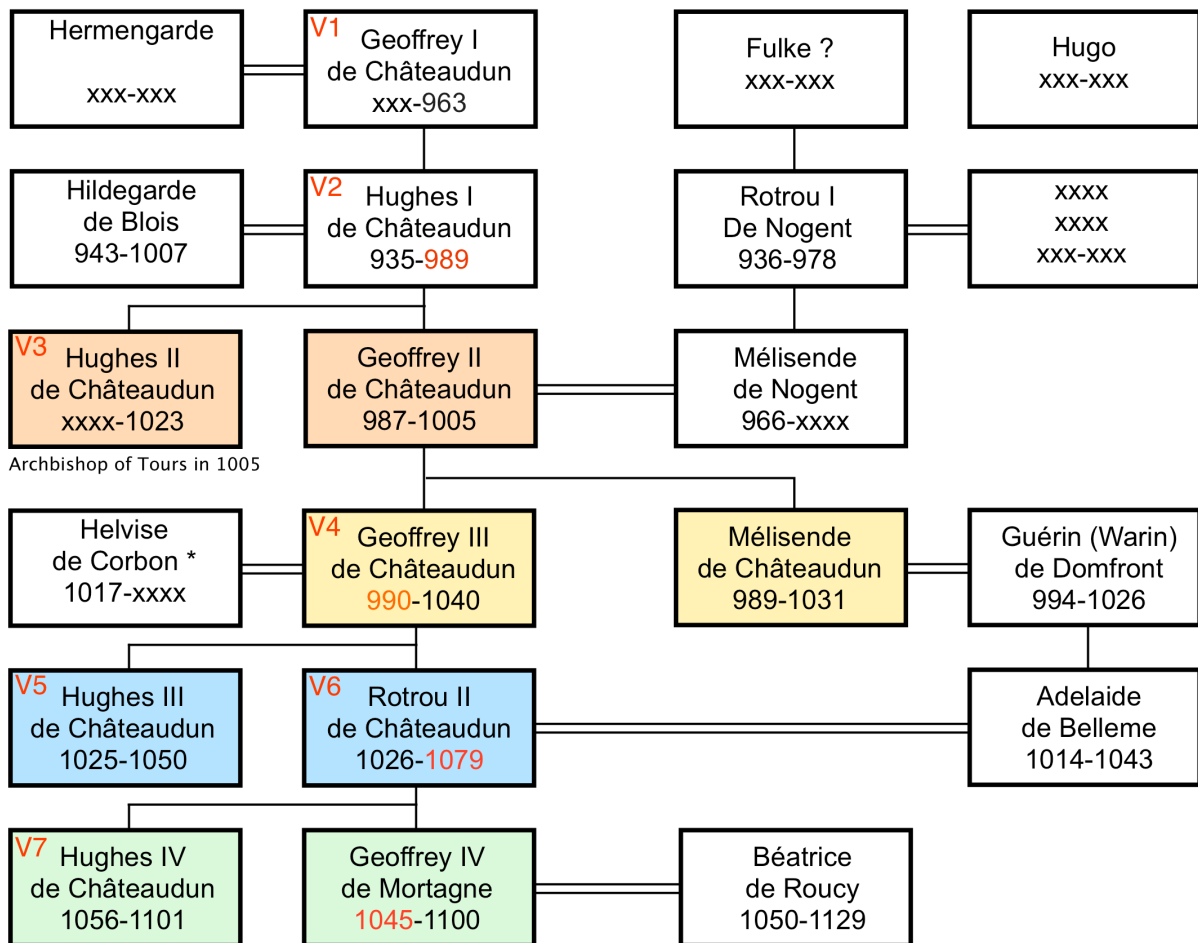
More recent studies suggest that Mélisende married a certain Fulke (Foulques) <sup>4</sup>, and that it may have been Fulke de Mortagne. If this is true, we must ask how Mélisendes son Geoffrey became Viscount of Châteaudun. It now seems possible that Mélisende married Fulke, a little known brother (or close relative) of Hughes, the current Viscount, and that all Hughes brothers died before he did, which could explain how Geoffrey, son of Mélisende, became Viscount.

As another complication, we are unsure of the names of the first counts of Châteaudun. And so we present the various hypotheses, pointing out the "fors" and "againsts". And we shall also try and fit Mélisende into our hypotheses, inasmuch as it is possible.

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<sup>4</sup> M.O. des Murs - Histoire des Comtes du Perche page 119 - quoting another historian H. Dallier "... ne pouvant détruire ou contester l'existence de Mélisende, comme mère de notre Geoffrey II, à mieux de lui donner pour mari un Foulques, à peu près inconnu ....."

## De Romanet's Hypothesis



\* Corbon is the old name for Mortagne. Recent research shows that Helvise was, in fact Helvise de Pithiviers.

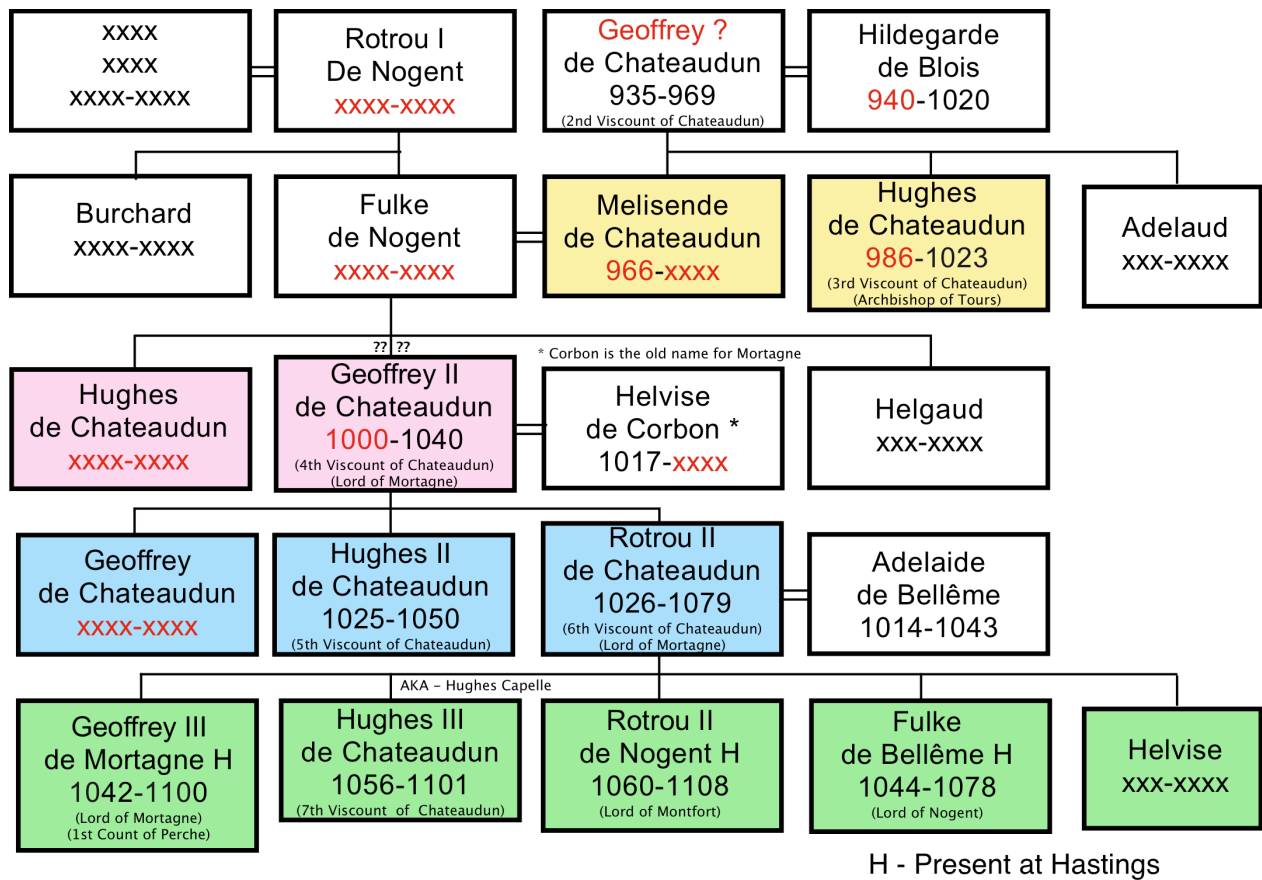
VX is the Viscount reference number

This diagram presents the theory that there were two distinct "Mélisendes", shows the second as being Mélisende de Chateaudun, daughter of the first Mélisende (Mélisende de Rotrou). This first Mélisende married the brother of the Viscount of Chateaudun (Geoffrey ?), and their son inherited the title when his uncle became Archbishop of Tours in 1005.

It also shows that Rotrou II married his "Cousin" Adelaide, because Mélisende de Chateaudun was his aunt.

NOTE : The numbers (II, III, etc.) given to Rotrou, Hughes and Geoffrey were given later, to eliminate confusion. They never had these numbers in their lifetime. Moreover, many documents differ in the attribution of these numbers, especially for the Geoffrey's and the Hughes.

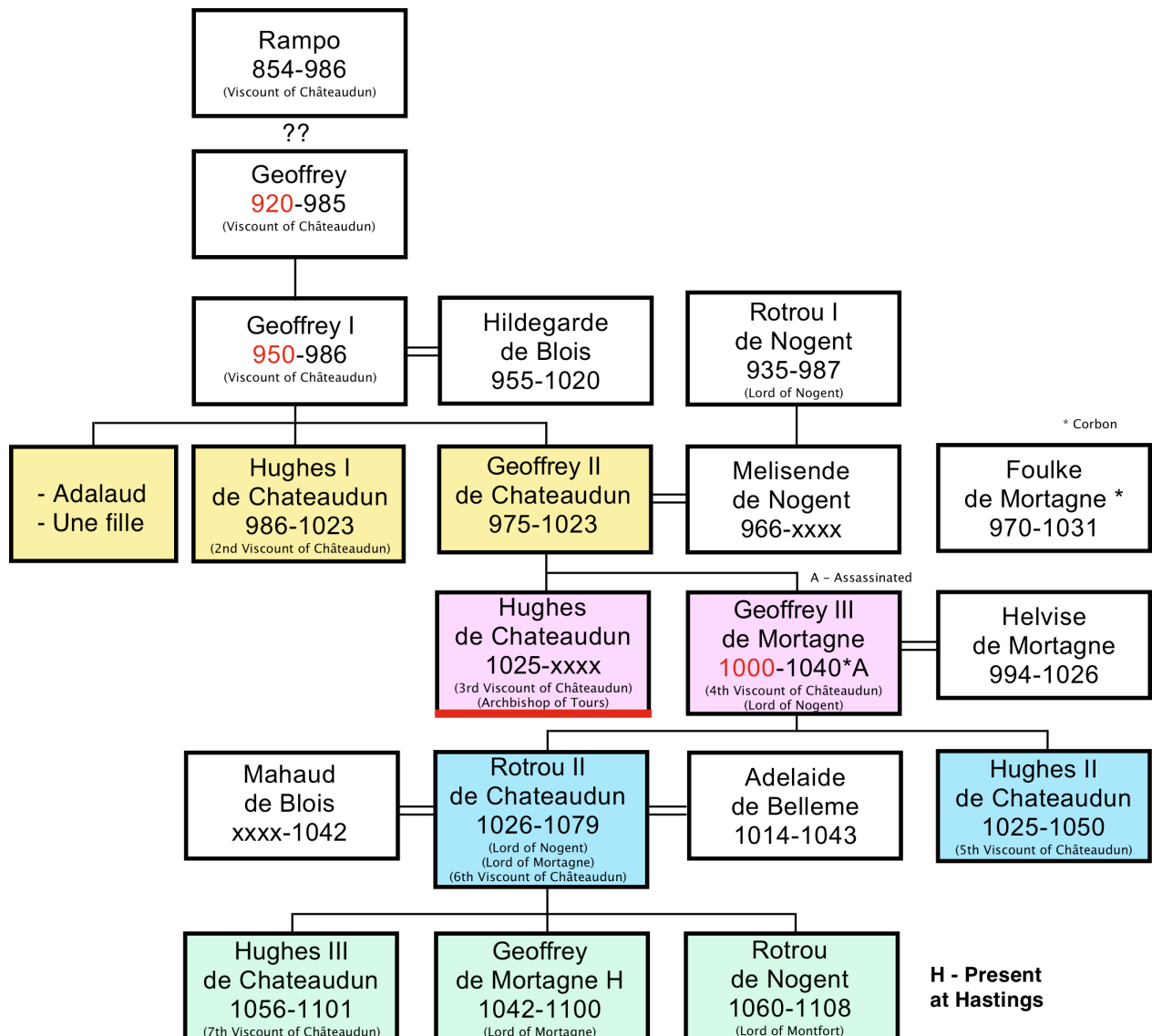
## OE Des Murs Hypothesis



A totally different reconstruction by the historian OE. Des Murs presents several problems. He defines only one Mélisende, when we know that there are several possible birth dates for Mélisende. He also quotes the son of Fulke<sup>5</sup> de Nogent (who marries Mélisende de Châteaudun) as having a son Geoffrey, who becomes Viscount of Châteaudun, a promotion extremely unlikely, to say the least. However, he does propose the idea of a Foulkes who marries a Mélisende, a concept which will appear under different auspices, in another hypothesis. However, there is no explanation of how Mélisende can also marry Guérin de Domfront, a complete generation later ! Christian Settapani also considers that it is exaggerated to consider that Geoffrey II is the son of Foulkes de Nogent, and also that Geoffrey would seem to have risen to the title of Viscount of Châteaudun rather rapidly. However, the early deaths of all the other possible candidates would make this possible. Did Hildegard de Blois marry Hugh de Châteaudun or Geoffrey de Châteaudun ? This construction raises more questions than it provides answers.

<sup>5</sup> Fulke has been written with several variants - Foulke, Fulquois

# FranceBalade Hypothesis



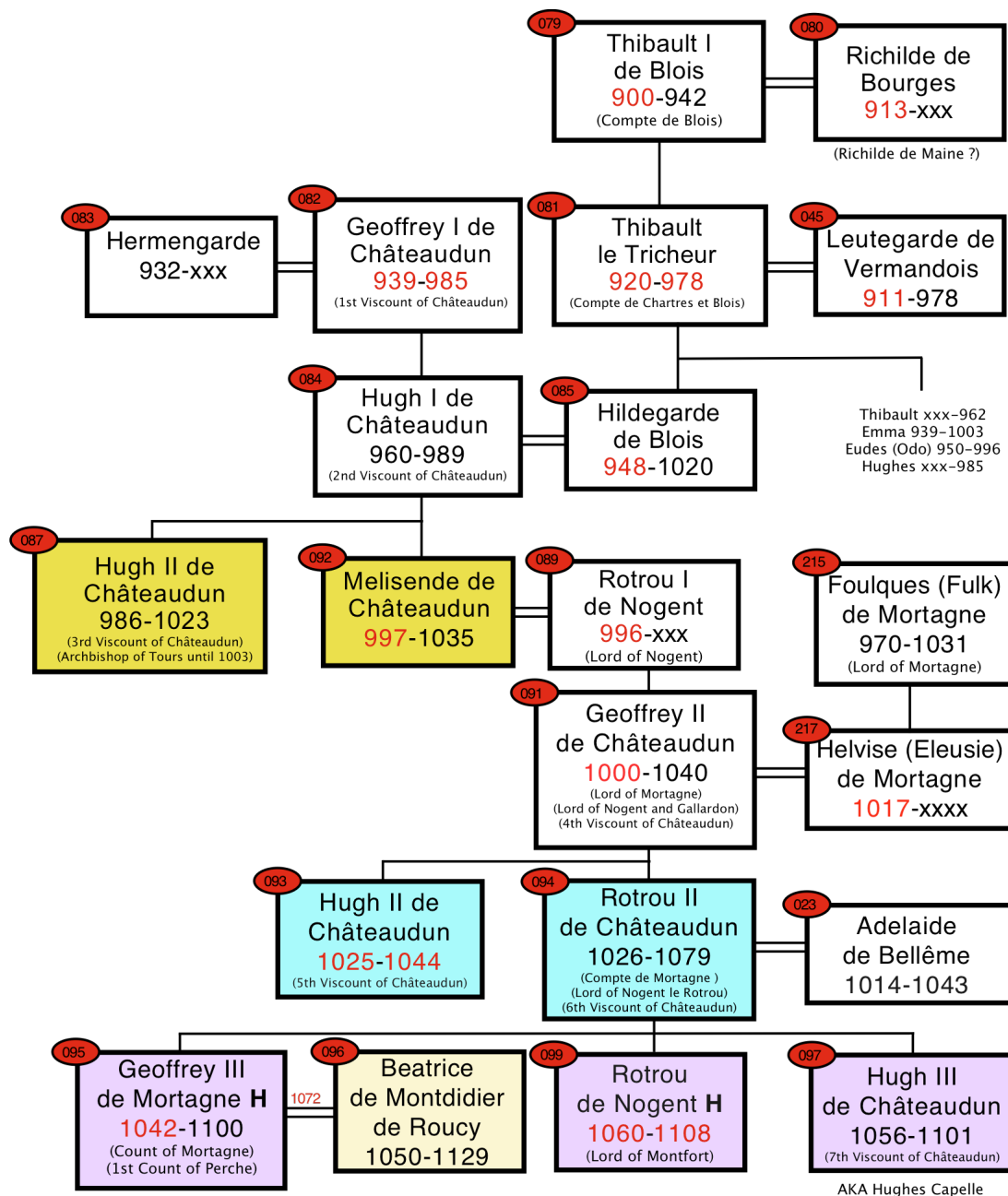
Here we see for the second time, a Mélisende who is the daughter of Rotrou de Nogent, who marries into the House of Châteaudun. This enticing concept clearly opens the way for an acceptable proposition: how the De Nogent and the de Châteaudun families were united, and how a De Nogent descendant became Viscount of Châteaudun. Another variation of this hypothesis is that Mélisende married, not Geoffrey de Châteaudun, but an unknown brother Fulke (see below). The birth dates above have been extrapolated, as the FranceBalade Internet site :

(<http://www.francebalade.com/chartres/ctdunois.htm>)

shows only the dates of accession to the Viscounty of Châteaudun.



## Kathleen Thompson's Hypothesis

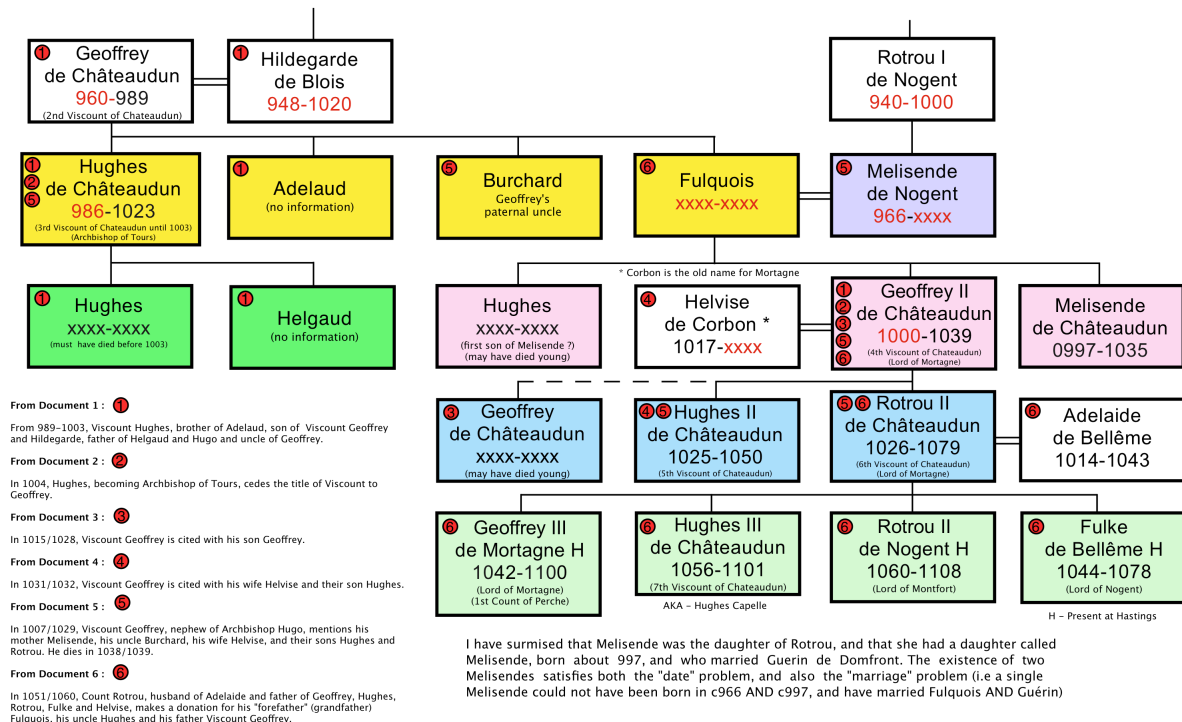


In her book "Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France - The County of the Perche", Kathleen Thompson constructs the descent of the Viscounts of Châteaudun, and the positioning of Mélisende within this period. Other genealogists, discussing such a hypothesis as this, find it unlikely that the son of Rotrou could accede to the title of Viscount of Châteaudun, a promotion that can be considered as "rather rapid" ! Finally, she does not take into consideration the possibility of two independant " Mélisendes ", and also the probability that a certain Mélisende de Châteaudun has been recorded as having married Warin de Domfront (994-1026).



## What We Are Sure Of

### From 6 Cartulary Documents Determined by Christian Settipani



After studying the different hypotheses, several of them extrapolations without proof, others partisan decisions with no foundation, it is immensely gratifying to contemplate the evaluations made by Christian Settipani (Université de la Sorbonne), from six cartulary documents drawn up at the precise time of events which took place over a period of about 100 years (five generations). This evidence cannot be refuted. When there is a lack of data, Settipani hazards intelligent guesses, but never overestimates their fragility. We cannot guarantee from his evaluations, the identity of the person who married Mélisende de Nogent. However, Settipani's evaluation agrees with the FranceBalade variation, that Mélisende marries an unknown relative of the Viscount of Châteaudun <sup>6</sup>, a certain Fulke. We are sure of Mélisendes' existence, but not the name of her father, although we are reasonably sure that it was the original (by which we mean, the first known) Rotrou de Nogent. Neither can we associate a brother Hughes, or a sister Mélisende de Châteaudun <sup>7</sup>, to our fourth Viscount of

<sup>6</sup> Although Settipani finally concludes : .... "En conséquence, on peut penser que Fulcois était un ascendant plus lointain de Rotrocus, le mot **avus** étant pris ici avec le sens étendu d'aïeul, ancêtre, et non seulement grand-père". "As a result, we could consider that Fulcois was a more distant member in the family of Rotrocus, the word *avus* (grandfather) being considered more in the sense ancestor, rather than grandfather".....

Finally, after taking a quick glance at the Settipani diagram above, we could easily accept that the position of Fulcois be raised by one generation to make him a brother of Geoffrey, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount, and that this would bring the birth dates of Mélisende and her father more correctly into line.

<sup>7</sup> ..... Although in the corresponding time frame, we have many references concerning a "Melisende de Châteaudun" who married Guérin (Warin) de Domfront. It seems perfectly acceptable to place this Mélisende as a descendant (probably a daughter) of Mélisende de Nogent.

Châteaudun, Geoffrey. But Settapani seems to know when to stop in his evaluations. Can we be satisfied with his results, even if we agree that there are some vital pieces of the jig-saw that are still missing ? Settapani's evaluations strengthen the idea that the De Nogent family is rewarded for their long standing relationship with the House of Blois, whose influence over the House of Châteaudun could certainly encourage such a marriage between our Mélisende and a member of the House of Châteaudun.

After ploughing through literally thousands of pages of Internet information, on dozens of sites, I was so disheartened with the fact that no birth or death dates of our De Nogent ancestors coincided, and that few of our amateur genealogists agreed on even the simplest of information, that I began to disbelieve practically all the information that I came across, until Mr. Settapani put me back on track, and helped me find the patience to continue in my research.

## How did Geoffrey II become Viscount ?

As if we did not have enough problems concerning the early descent of the Rotrou family, there remains another problem which is compounded with the enigma of Mélisende.

Documentary evidence, scarce though it may be, has shown that Mélisende was very probably the daughter of Rotrou de Nogent. We know that Mélisende's son Geoffrey became Viscount of Châteaudun, but we are left to speculate about the way in which this was possible. There is no way that the son of Rotrou could aspire to the title of Viscount of Châteaudun, as there is no proof of blood or marriage ties with the House of Châteaudun at this time. We are left with the compelling suggestion that Geoffrey could become Viscount because of his father's ties to that family. Documents concerning Mélisende's husband are conflicting, indicating that it could have been the current Viscount of Châteaudun, although we are not sure if it was Hugh or his brother Geoffrey. Possibly, Geoffrey became Viscount when his brother rescinded the title in 1005<sup>8</sup>, but died very soon after, leaving no direct descendant. Information is scanty concerning the early Viscounts, and only becomes uncontested when we reach the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. but seem to indicate that it was a certain Fulke (or Foulquois), but information is incomplete and does not clarify the identity of this man.

There are several possibilities, which can be gleaned from the limited charters of the time.

1 – Fulke was Lord of Mortagne, and his uncle was Hervé II, also Lord before him. Although Fulke's wife is not known, he was reputed to have had a daughter Helvise (or Heloise), and that she married Geoffrey II de Châteaudun, thus passing him the title of Lord of Mortagne. This solves the problem of how the title Lord of Mortagne came into the Châteaudun family, but certainly not how the Châteaudun title came into the family of Rotrou.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman\\_Catholic\\_Archdiocese\\_of\\_Tours#1000-1300](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Archdiocese_of_Tours#1000-1300) indicates that Hugh was Archbishop from 1008.

Recent research (Keats-Rohan, Settapani <sup>9</sup> et alia) insists that Geoffrey II married a certain Heloise de Pithiviers, and thus the title of Lord of Mortagne could not come to Geoffrey II in the way supposed above. In addition to this question, if Mélisende married Fulke de Mortagne, we must ask ourselves, how is it possible that her son Geoffrey II became Viscount of Châteaudun, as there are no direct blood ties. Settapani supposes that Fulke was a member of the Châteaudun family, without specifying how.

2 – Fulke could have been a little known relative (possibly brother) of Hugh II of Châteaudun, Viscount until he became Archbishop of Tours in 1005, and rescinded his title. As it seems that the Hugh's brother (Geoffrey) died relatively young, although he may have held the title of Viscount for a very short time, there was no direct line of descent to the title of Viscount, and so it fell to Geoffrey II, who was the son-in-law of the previous Viscount. It must be made clear that apart from a supposition that Fulke was Hugh's brother, there is little information concerning his existence. If he married Mélisende about 989, he may have been in his late 30's. Had he married into the House of Châteaudun at an earlier date, and Mélisende was his second wife ? A charter of 1051 by Rotrou II mentioning a certain Fulke as his « avus » (usually grandfather), confirms the existence of Fulke, and his relation to Mélisende, but still does not define his origins <sup>10</sup>. Geoffrey II, although making reference to his mother Mélisende, never mentions his father at all in the few charters concerning him, which is a little strange, although Fulke may have died earlier. Rotrou mentions his grandfather as Count, but does not specify over which territory. As Rotrou was clearly Count of Mortagne, it is assumed that his grandfather was also Count of Mortagne, which leads us back to the problem in (1), above.

3 - There is a third possibility, largely discounted because of recent research. Could Mélisende be a sister of Hughes, Viscount of Châteaudun ? Early research postulated that this Mélisende married Rotrou de Nogent, and so their son Geoffrey could eventually become Viscount when Hughes rescinded his title in 1003 (if no other successors were alive). This theory imagined that Mélisende lived to a ripe old age, married Rotrou when she was young, and later married Warin (Guerin) de Domfront, many years later, which would seem rather unlikely. As it seems likely that Mélisende de Nogent and Mélisende de Châteaudun both existed, it is easy to propose two different Mélisendes, defining the second as being the daughter of the first, and locating them both in the appropriate time frames. Mélisende de Nogent would then be the daughter of Rotrou and her marriage into the Châteaudun family could be shown as a « thank you » to the Rotrou family for services rendered. Whoever Mélisende married, it was probably unforeseen that her son would become Viscount, when all possible contenders were already dead (Hugh had two sons who died young, and Hughes brother Geoffrey apparently died at the same time as Hugh became Archbishop). Mélisende de Châteaudun would then be Geoffrey II's sister, and the time frame for her to marry Warin de Domfront would be satisfied.

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<sup>9</sup> Christian Settapani – Prosopon Newsletter, 1999 – Les Vicomtes de Châteaudun et leurs Alliés

<sup>10</sup> Stewart Baldwins research into segments of the Rotrou Family (not his main interest) are extremely rigorous, and suggest all possible relationships of the family at this time, without any partisan attitude. For details, consult the Internet Site <http://sbaldw.home.mindspring.com/hproject/prov> (specifically sections concerning Mélisende, Fulcois, Geoffrey I and Geoffrey II)

A final historical note can be added here. Mélisende and Fulke had another son, Hughes de Perche, who by his marriage to Beatrix de Gatinais had a son, Geoffrey de Ferreol. This would make Fulke the root of the Plantagenat <sup>11</sup> line of the future.

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<sup>11</sup> House of Plantagenet - the name given to the dynasty of the 14 Kings of England that ruled for the 331 years from 1154 until 1485.