

Belvoir: The Heirs of Robert and Berengar de Tosny.

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Succession to the fee of Belvoir has been discussed as a problem several times over the years, but perhaps the issue is actually straightforward once one has identified the key players.¹ Domesday's Robert de Tosny of Belvoir was a collateral of his contemporaries Ralph and Roger. By c. 1050+ he had a first-born son Berengar who could expect to succeed his father in Normandy.² Around the time of Domesday Book, a few years before his death, Robert founded Belvoir priory with his wife Adelais. Early charters of Belvoir mention their sons William and Geoffrey and their daughter Agnes.³ At his death, Robert's lands were divided between Berengar, his eldest son and Norman heir – co-incidentally an English tenant-in-chief in his own right – and his next son and English heir, William. Presumably some provision was made for the third son Geoffrey. As it happened, all three sons were to die without issue, which meant that rights of succession passed to Robert's daughters.

Initially, the sole right of succession passed to Robert's eldest daughter Albreda, who inherited the tenancies-in-chief of both her eldest brother Berengar and her younger brother William before the date of the Lindsey Survey, which shows her husband Robert de Insula in charge of both honours.⁴ It has always been assumed that Albreda was the widow of Berengar who took his land to a second husband, but the idea is clearly untenable once the full story of the Belvoir succession unfolds. The references in confirmation charters of the Lincolnshire abbey of Newhouse to 'the fee of Albreda de Tosny' is an indication that the wife of Robert de Insula was a blood relative and heiress of Berengar, rather than his widow.⁵ This view is confirmed by the necrology of Belvoir priory, where the anniversaries of Berengar and Albreda uxor eius, deo sancta (a phrase always referring to a religious in this document) were kept on 29 June.⁶ All doubt is removed by a charter of c. 1147/52 in which Hugh Bigod made a grant to Kirkstall abbey for the soul of Albrede de Insula amite mee, a phrase that can only mean that Albreda was his mother's sister.⁷ The phrase also usefully confirms that Albreda de Tosny and Albreda (wife of Robert) de Insula were the same.

Robert de Tosny had two other daughters, of whom the youngest was Agnes. She confirmed her father's grant of land at Aslackby, Lincolnshire, to Belvoir priory as being part of her marriage portion on her first marriage to Ralph de Beaufour of Hockering (fl. 1086/1100).⁸ Widowed in the early twelfth century, she married secondly Hubert I de Ryes, castellan of Norwich, to whom the tenancy-in-chief of Hockering was given by Henry I. She occurs in the 1129/30 Pipe Roll (p. 93) charged with a debt of 35 silver marks because her son was with the count of Flanders. At a similar date she attested the charter which William de Albini pincerna gave for Wymondham priory on the day his wife Matilda Bigod, Agnes's niece, died. Agnes follows her sister Adelisa Bigod in the witness list, where she was accompanied by her daughter Almud and a niece or granddaughter (nepta) Muriel.⁹ Her dower lands at Aslackby and at Seaton, Northamptonshire (then in Rutland), were held in 1166 by her son or grandson Ralph de Beaufour from her grandson Hubert II de Ryes.¹⁰

The elder of Robert de Tosny's younger daughters was Adelisa, wife of Roger Bigod at his death in 1107. It is probable that Roger was married only once, although he is usually credited with two wives of the same name on the inconclusive evidence of a pro anama clause in a charter of his son William.¹¹ Roger and his wife Adelisa gave charter for Rochester priory which referred to their sons and daughters and was attested by their children William, Humphrey, Gunnor and Matilda.¹² This charter tellingly refers to King Henry, making it highly unlikely that Roger acquired a second wife and second family before his death in 1107. It is likely that Rogers' children were born from the late 1090s onwards, and that the youngest of them were Hugh and Cecilia.¹³ Roger's daughters Gunnor and Matilda were married soon after 1107. Gunnor's marriage to Robert fitz Swein of Essex had perhaps been arranged by her father. Matilda was married to William de Albini pincerna by Henry I who bestowed 10 Bigod fees on her as a marriage portion. The marriages certainly took place before Adelisa de Tosny became the heiress to Belvoir on the death without issue of her eldest sister Albreda, some time between 1115/18 and 1129, when Adelisa, as widow of Roger Bigod, accounted for her father's land of Belvoir.¹⁴

In 1129 the sole surviving issue of Robert de Tosny were his younger daughters Adelisa Bigod and Agnes de Beaufour, who was then already married to Hubert de Ryes. At that date his Bigod granddaughter Matilda de Albini was probably already dead and her sister Gunnor not long removed from her second marriage to Haimo de St Clair. Of their siblings, only Hugh Bigod and Cecilia, then wife of William de Albini Brito, survived. The Carta returned by Hugh Bigod in 1166 shows him holding the fee of his aunt Albreda de Insula.¹⁵ At the same date William de Albini Brito II held the fee of Belvoir. The conclusion from this must be that Adelisa succeeded Albreda in the fees of both Berengar and Robert de Tosny as next surviving sister. When she in her turn died she left issue of both sexes. Her sole surviving son Hugh succeeded his aunt Albreda - and by extension, her eldest brother Berengar - as heir both to Berengar's tenancy-in-chief in Lincolnshire and the Norman lands of Robert de Tosny of Belvoir. His tenancy of Robert's Norman lands is shown in a Norman record of 1172 where he is named as holding land of the fee of Conches and Tosny.¹⁶ More important in terms of size in England, the lordship of Belvoir was nonetheless the lesser of the two Tosny lordships because it was not associated with their Norman heritage. As the inheritance of a woman married to an important tenant-in-chief it could be expected to pass to one of her younger children and not her husband's principal male heir. Since she had no surviving younger sons after 1120, the devolution of Belvoir to one of her daughters was inevitable. Gunnor and Matilda had long since been provided for from their father's inheritance by the time, after c. 1115/1118, that Adelisa succeeded to Belvoir. Consequently it was the youngest daughter Cecilia - quite probably a mere infant at her father's death in 1107 - who became her mother's heiress. She was, of course, an heiress whose marriage could advantageously be used to reward one of the king's loyal new men. Cecilia's marriage to William de Albini Brito has been said to have occurred as early as 1107 on the basis of a Belvoir charter given by Ralph de Raines and attested by Roger Bigod, but it certainly took place much later. The Belvoir charter just mentioned probably begins to the early 1140s. It was attested by William de Albini senior and his wife Cecilia, their son William junior, Roger Bigot, Robert de Toteneio, Ralph de Albeneio and others.¹⁷ Since William, Robert and Ralph were certainly sons of William and Cecilia it is clear that Roger Bigod was also, as is confirmed by the order of their sons William, Robert, Roger, listed in the Thorney Liber vitae (BL Add, 40,000, fol. 2r)

The prosopography of Domesday Book which is part of the COEL research project will be published later this year by Boydell and Brewer as *Domesday People: A Prosopography of Persons Occurring in English Documents 1066-1166. Volume I. Domesday Book.*

It is hoped that the COEL database will be published in November/December. Final details are still to be decided, but a network copy will probably cost around £600. A few screen shots from the database are available on the Unit website, <http://www.linacre.ox.ac.uk/prosop/home.stm> (or, if that proves troublesome, www.linacre.ox.ac.uk, then click on Unit).

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NOTES

¹ Cf. J. Green, *Government of England Under Henry I*, pp. 228-9.

² Named after his father's brother Berengar Spina, all three occur in a Marmoutier charter of 1063, when Berengar, probably then still an adolescent, authorised an agreement made by his father (Faroux, *Recueil ... de Normandie*, 157).

³ *Mon. Ang.* ii, 288-9.

⁴ Lindsey Survey (*Lincoln Record Soc. Vol. 19*) L3/8, 4/3, 6/5, 7/5, 10/1.

⁵ Stenton, *Danelaw Charters*, nos. 238-9.

⁶ BL Add. 4936, fol. 27.

⁷ *Coucher Book of Kirkstall* (*Thoresby Soc. Vol. 8, 1904*), no. cclxvi, pp. 188-9.

⁸ *Mon. Ang.* ii, 290, no. vii.

⁹ *Mon. Ang.* iii, 330-1.

¹⁰ RBE, 401.

¹¹ *Mon. Ang.* iii, 330-1.

¹² BL Cotton Domitian A x, fol. 201v-2r.

¹³ The view that all his children were minors at his death in 1107 was expressed in A. Wareham, 'Motives and politics of the Bigod family c. 1066-1177', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 17 (1995).

¹⁴ Pipe Roll 31 Henry I, 114.

¹⁵ RBE 397.

¹⁶ At Guerny and Vesley, Eure, cant. Gisors; RBE, 642; cf. Loyd, *Anglo-Norman Families*, 74.

¹⁷ *Mon. Ang.* ii, 289, no. 111.