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**For Sabrina Rampersad**

## INTRODUCTION

**W**HEN a selection of the objects from the great Viking ship burial on the Ile de Groix, off the south coast of Brittany, was displayed at Caen in 1987, the accompanying text lamented the fact that the most interesting Scandinavian finds in France came from a region where the Vikings played only *un rôle passager*. That the Viking impact on Brittany should be considered fleeting is principally the result of a lack of detailed study coupled with a dearth of excavated remains.

The first problem encountered by the student is that of nomenclature (cf. Page 1984-5, 308-9). It seems reasonable to use the term 'Vikings' to refer to the large numbers of Scandinavians who descended on Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries in search of loot and plunder, sustaining themselves by means of a life of itinerant violence. It is to this category, which includes the Great Army, that the majority of Scandinavians operating in Brittany belong, hence the title of this paper. Wherever possible, national terms (Norwegians, Danes, etc.) will be employed to describe these people, and a clear distinction will be drawn between Viking raiders and those who chose to settle in the lands they had conquered. Part of the problem is the almost universal use in the French sources of the term *Normands* to refer to Scandinavians; to translate this as 'Normans' is misleading (the word has been used in translating an annal written as early as 866, in Sawyer 1971, 128). In this paper the term refers only to the inhabitants of the region of modern Normandy after the succession of William Longsword c. 925.

Similarly, the geographical and chronological range needs to be clarified. Before the ninth century, early medieval Brittany proper was the area west of the linguistic boundary dividing places with Breton and Frankish names (i.e. the Franko-Breton March), broadly corresponding to the course of the river Vilaine. After that date, and certainly in a Viking context, Brittany extended to roughly its modern borders, incorporating the counties of Rennes and Nantes. It must also be remembered that at times Breton influence extended far into Neustria and Aquitaine. Turning to chronology, the first real Viking contact with Brittany comes in the early ninth century and the major impact is over by 950. Nevertheless, sporadic raiding continued late into the tenth century

and Brittany was subject to a degree of Scandinavian influence via the Duchy of Normandy well into the eleventh century. Such then is the general chronological scope of this paper, though reference will occasionally be made to relevant events at earlier and later dates as appropriate.

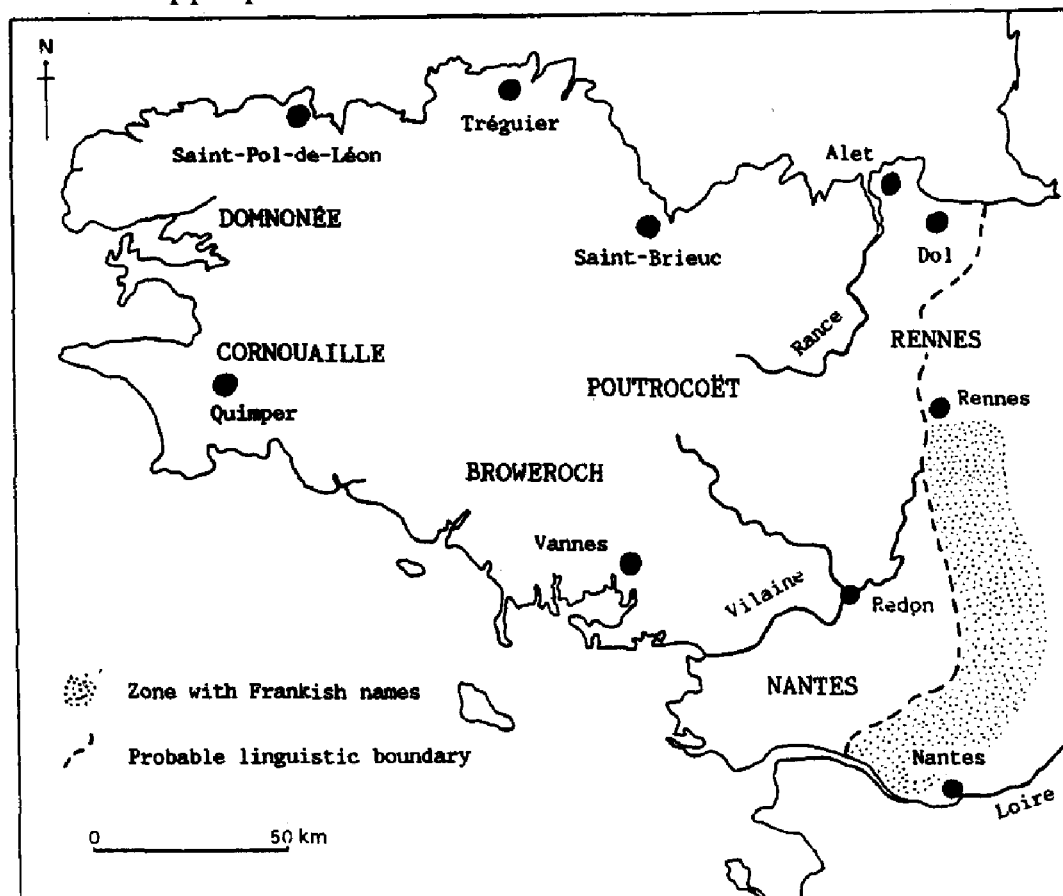


Fig. 1. Early Medieval Brittany (after Davies 1988)

Only two summaries of the subject have appeared in English in recent years, both of which concentrate on the Carolingian Empire and deal with the Vikings secondarily (McKitterick 1983; Smith 1985, by far the most detailed study to date). Furthermore, the activities of the Vikings in Brittany have never been studied from the viewpoint of the invaders themselves; instead the Breton reaction has been stressed.

This paper attempts to redress the balance, examining different aspects of the evidence in turn, in an effort to shine some light on this neglected area of Viking studies. Firstly, the relevant documentary material is reviewed and the manuscripts' relative merits and accuracy discussed. In each case any political propaganda bias and possible scribal preoccupations are considered, along with the effect of the Viking incursions on the Breton scriptoria.



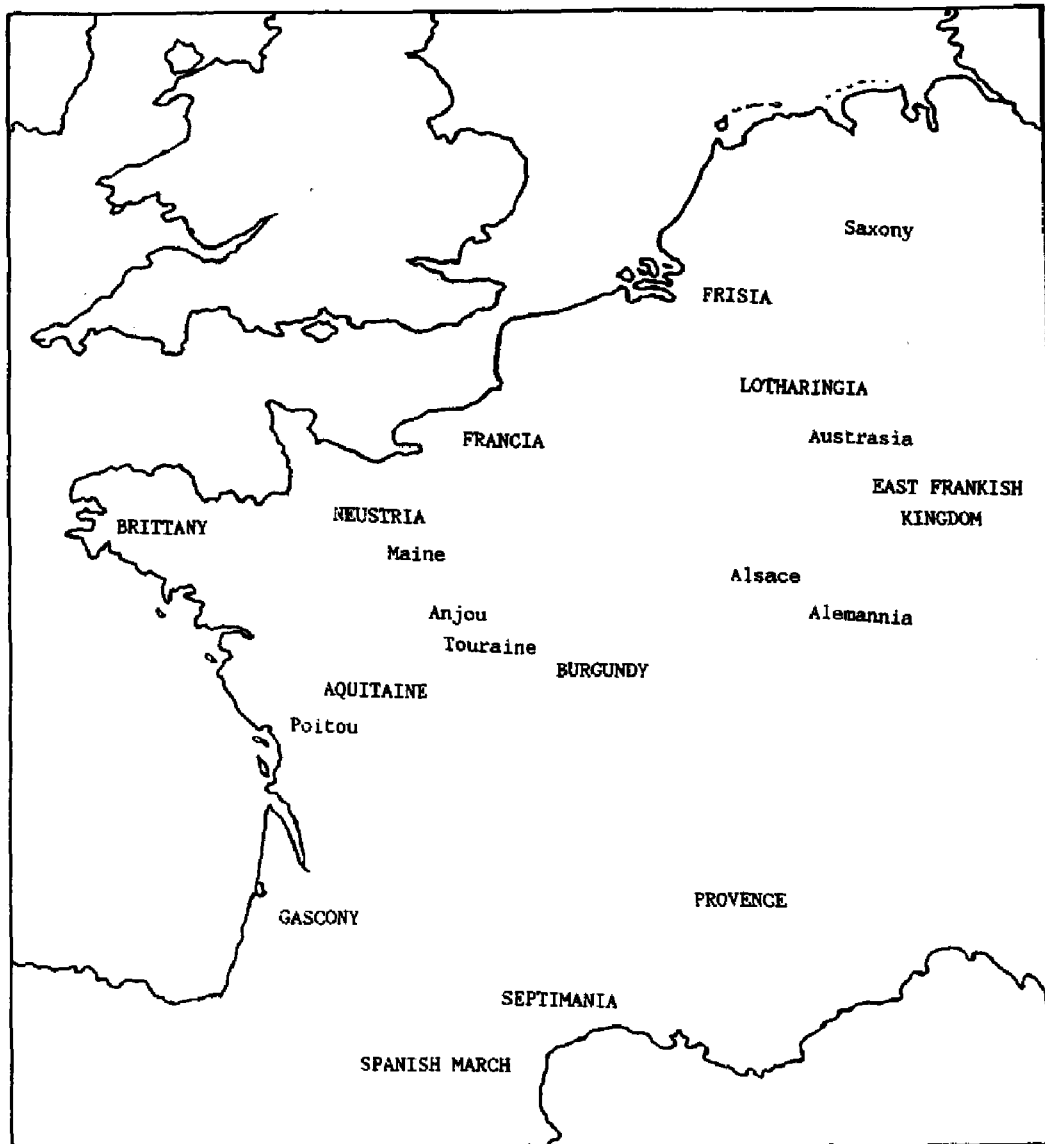


Fig. 2. The territories of the later Carolingian Empire

Using the information from these documentary sources, the Vikings in Brittany are studied against the historical background of French ninth- to eleventh-century power politics. Such factors as the growth of Breton independence and the great complexity of the relationships between the different interests are also taken into account: the opportunistic civil warfare that the Scandinavians exploited at every level as the various factions formed alliances with different Viking mercenary fleets, each with its own leaders and motives. Only by unravelling this tangled situation can the Scandinavian impact on the Breton church and state be assessed.

In the third chapter the archaeological material is examined: the corpus of Scandinavian sites and finds in Brittany, including fortifications, burials and destruction levels at monasteries and secular sites recorded as targets of Viking attacks. Along with

weaponry dredged from the great arterial rivers of France, Neustrian towns and early Norman settlements are additionally studied as possible analogues for gaps in the Breton archaeology. The place-name evidence is also reviewed.

The evidence is then drawn together in a conclusion which presents a new model for the Scandinavian involvement in Brittany, setting the area in its context of the wider Viking world through comparison with contemporary Scandinavian operations in England and the Celtic West. Particular emphasis is placed on Wales, with which Brittany has interesting parallels, especially regarding the action of the Vikings as catalysts for political unity (albeit sometimes temporary) but with little archaeological impact. Issues such as the dispersal of the last Viking mercenary armies, the development of the Duchy of Normandy and the Bretons' rôle in European politics are also considered. Finally, two appendices provide a gazetteer of Scandinavian sites and finds in Brittany and Normandy and lists of contemporary rulers.