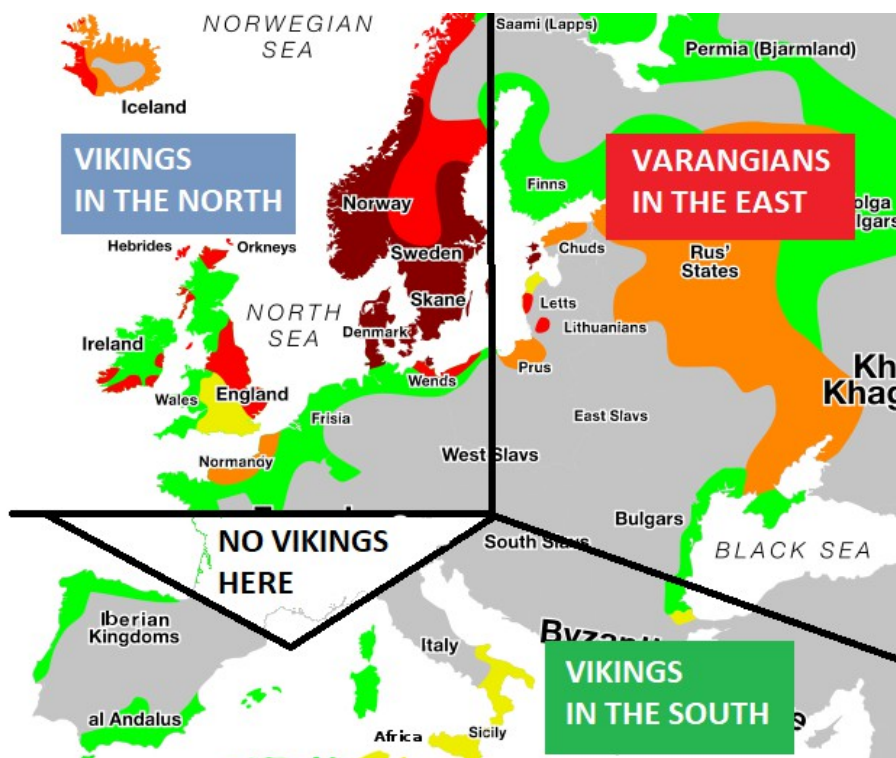


# When Toponymy questions History. Statistics versus clichés.

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France is the most Latin of the Nordic countries. Some people have trouble with this obvious fact, but France bathes its feet in the Mediterranean and its head in the North Sea. However, there was a time when the authors of the "Roman national" novel sought to play down the part played by the Nordic Barbarians and pagans in the country's identity and culture, in order to emphasise its Mediterranean and Roman roots, the bearers of Judeo-Christian civilisation and culture. This was obviously an overreaction, and this ideological vision has since been re-evaluated. Today, we accept the idea that the Pays d'Oïl - roughly speaking, the country north of the Loire - is in a northern zone, but still consider the Pays d'Oc -south of Loire- to be Mediterranean in culture and settlement. As historians know, migration from the north did not stop at the Loire. Vandals, Suevi and Franks all crossed the river. The Vikings too. According to Gascon sources, the men from the north not only invaded Aquitaine, but dominated part of it - the Gascon area between the Garonne and the ocean - for a century and a half. Logically, these men must have left a significant toponymy, as they did in Great Britain and Normandy. To date, toponymists have never discovered any such toponymy. There is an explanation for this

anomaly: toponymy is seen as a science ancillary to history. Historiography declares that the Vikings only crossed Aquitaine without ever trying to settle, so toponymists have never tried to identify any Scandinavian toponymy in Aquitaine. However, the fact that the people of the North never settled is more a matter of assumption, or even incantation, than historical reality. Texts from Gascony, as well as from Italy (André de Bergame) and France (Andrevald de Fleury) are unambiguous about the Scandinavian conquest of Aquitaine. If we assume Scandinavian settlement, this toponymy of Scandinavian origin must logically exist. All you have to do then is dig into a Scandinavian thesaurus to find the inconceivable.

### **Methodology.**

As my detractors know, I am neither a historian nor a linguist, but I do apply methodologies. They can be criticised, and they have to. But they do have one quality: they provide an objective approach to a reality that is often distorted or even limited by clichés and preconceived ideas. The principle behind my approach is simple: if the Vikings had settled south of the Loire, as I claim, then we should find Scandinavian place names in the southern half of France. So I decided to make as methodical an inventory as possible.

To do this, I compared two lists. A list of Scandinavian first names and a list of French place names. The first list was compiled from the Viking Answer Lady website, Old Norse men's names. I entered these first names into Geoportailn the IGN (Institut Géographique National) search engine, which lists the names of French hamlets and villages. This process brought up hundreds of toponyms randomly from all over the country. Of course, I didn't just take the raw first names. I also worked out phonetic variants, which I certainly didn't consider all.

This technique - no more than the traditional technique used by linguists - does not guarantee the result. There are bound to be omissions and false friends. What interests us at this stage is not accuracy, but trends. Even if we have 20 or 30% errors, the important thing is to note that certain regions are under-represented, while others have a rich toponymy. If we see that these names are most numerous in north-east France, we can logically suggest that this toponymy is not of Scandinavian origin, but of Germanic origin. If it is over-represented in Normandy, Brittany and the Hauts de France, traditional regions identified as having been impacted by the men of the North, then the toponymy will confirm the Normando-centric discourse of the Norman school. If this toponymy appears in Gascony, then it will mean that the men from the North have indeed settled south of the Loire and that it is high time to revise the teachings of the Roman national.

### **Area of research.**

This study will focus on first names only. I therefore exclude from the outset all place names based on common nouns: gatborg (Gatebourg), castle of the gate, traelleborg (Taillebourg, Tralbot), castle of the slaves, kaupang (Caupenne, Capens), market, markad (Marcadet, Marcadieu), market, mjälhus (Maillos, Maylis), mill, althing and thing (Altilac, Hardy, Antin), assembly. Among the place names based on a first name, I have chosen not to include those with the suffix haug, motte. These haug toponyms gave rise to names like Bergerac (Berggeirhaug, Berggeir's mound), Larzac (Lars's mound), Espartignac (Svarting), Cadillac (Kaetill), Toutigeac (Tostig) etc... As -ac names are mainly found between the Garonne and Rhône valleys, some might argue that the south is 'artificially' over-represented by these -ac names, which don't exist in the north. In the same way, I'm not going to take into account place names built with the suffix -ville. These can be found in Normandy, the Charentes and the Toulouse region. These hybrid -ville names are actually

late. In our view, they are evidence of the arrival of settlers of Scandinavian origin who were already Romanised. They may not have come from Scandinavia, but from other Scandinavian colonies in Christian lands. Perhaps from the British Isles, more likely from Gascony. The place names we are looking for are older.

I'm only going to look at place names that correspond to a first name associated with the suffix hus, house. Some will remain unchanged. Barcus (Pyrénées-atlantiques), the house of Bark. Others will only keep the final 's'. Audeguils (Lot-et-Garonne) for the house of Audgisl. Some will lose the final 's' and become bare first names: Quittimont (Lot-et-Garonne), for Kaetillmund, Joffre (Aude, Gironde) for Jafri, Audemar (Aude), for Oddmarr.

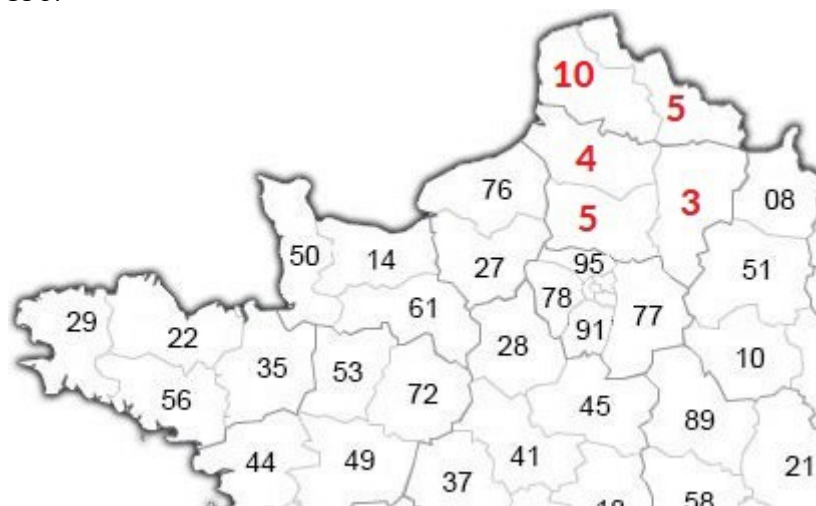
### A toponym revealing colonial settlements.

This toponymy based on Scandinavian surnames combined with the hus suffix is logically indicative of an area of colonial settlement. It was Scandinavian settlers - not passing warriors - who created such place names.

We're going to produce a series of maps and start by looking at the regions from north to south. We'll start with the five departments of Hauts de France, then the five departments of Normandy, then the four of Brittany, to which we'll add the Loire Atlantique. These three regions have been the scene of well-known events linked to the Northmen. Next, we'll look at the vast kingdom of Aquitaine, which stretched from the Loire to the Pyrenees and to the Rhône, a kingdom which, according to the Norman school, was spared by the Vikings... Statistical toponymy will enable us to settle this question.

### Hauts-de- France

These Scandinavian place names come as no surprise. Before the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte was signed in 911, the Vikings criss-crossed this region with their 'Great Army'. This Great Army was made up of settlers who, driven out of England following the peace treaty signed with Alfred the Great in 877, crossed over to the continent to find land to settle on. This 'Great Army', which went so far as to turn the throne room of the palace of Aachen into a stable, left the continent in 892 after a great famine had begun in 891. These Scandinavian place names were probably created between 840 and 890.



In the Pas-de-Calais, we can identify: Erin (Haering). Caumont (Kalmund). Saint-Géry (Asgeir)<sup>1</sup>.

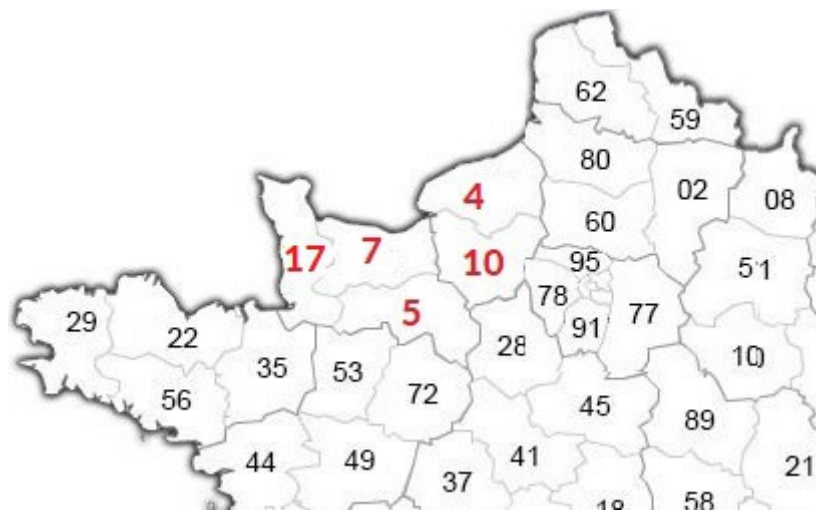
1 Asgeir > Sgeir > S. Geir > Saint-Geir > Saint-Géry. The first letter "A" is falling very often in French. Je vais à Asgeirhus becomes je vais à Sgeirhus. Then, French monks will canonized Viking place names beginning with a 's'.

Esquerdes (Skaerdi). Escalles (Skalli). Arques (Harek). Recques (Rekk). Fressin (Freysteinn), Vignemont (Vigmund), Bimont (Vigmund).

## Normandie

We do not claim to identify all the place names of Scandinavian origin in Normandy. We are only listing those revealed by the toponymic cross-referencing we have defined. We would point out that we have not retained the -ville names, many of which have a Scandinavian first name as their root. These hybrid place-names are late, a priori dating from after the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte in 911. We have found around forty in the five departments of Normandy: Calvados (14), Eure (27), Manche (50), Orne (61) and Seine Maritime (76).

Calvados (14): 7 - Eure (27): 10 - Manche (50): 17 - Orne (61): 5 - Seine maritime (76): 4



The Manche department is the most represented. The -hus toponyms are thought to have been left by the first Scandinavian settlers in Normandy. It is easy to understand why they were more prevalent in the Manche, a peninsula that was easy to access from sea and convenient to protect from inland attacks. It was also far from the centres of Frankish power. In the Eure, the presence of these place names seems to suggest that the men from the north began settling there before 911, probably as early as 841. It is usually assumed that the Vikings withdrew and returned to Scandinavia after each attack. This is historical and logistical nonsense. The men who left Scandinavia for the south had no land and no future in Scandinavia. They had no reason to return to the North where there was no land for sale, even for the richest among them. Their interest was in finding good land in a pleasant climate and a wife. What's more, the Scandinavian world rationed its consumption to get through the winter. No chieftain worth his salt could have deprived the country of his arms during the summer and brought in extra mouths to feed during the winter. From the outset, Viking chiefs knew that it was easier to feed their men by wintering in the south. Historians who still believe that the Vikings waited until 843 to winter for the first time are extremely naive. They claim that there is no evidence of any wintering prior to this date... yet the presence of a 'Land of the Madjous' north of the Pyrenees as early as 793 puts an end to the debate: the men from the north had settled there more than half a century before the official 'first wintering'... In La Manche, we note : Aumont (Audmund). Baude (Baldi). Baudry (Baldrek), Baudouin (Baldwin). Le Frestin (Freystein). Ger (Geir). Gisors (Gizurr). Godefroy (Godfrid). La Herguerie (Hergeirr). Lotin (Lothin). Robillard (Hrobjart). Raumont (Rodmund). Mortain (Morsteinn). Sigard (Sigarr). Hardinvast (Steinfast). Havre de Houltvi (Ulf). Ballé (Valli).

## Bretagne

There are four departments in Brittany. Côtes-d'Armor (22), Finistère (29), Ille-et-Villaine (35) and Morbihan (56). To these départements we add Loire-Atlantique (44) which, although not administratively part of the region, was historically part of it.

This region was frequented very early on by men from the north as they passed through on their way to the 'Pays des Madjous' in Aquitaine. We know that after the cession of the mouth of the Seine in 911, the region was the target of a Scandinavian offensive that was defeated in 940. Around thirty place names appear. There are obviously many more, but the principle is to stick to the procedure that has been put in place so that all regions are treated in the same way.

Côtes-d'Armor (22): 6 - Finistère (29): 1 - Ille-et-Villaine (35): 7 - Loire atlantique (44): 6 - Morbihan (56): 10 Total: 31.



Morbihan was the department most affected. It's not hard to imagine why this was the case. As well as being the sunniest department in Brittany, it has a peninsula, Quiberon, which is a launch pad for the Vilaine and Loire estuaries, as well as the southern Bay of Biscay. Quiberon, formerly Kerberoenn, is thought to refer to the house (ker in breton) of beroenn (read Beorn), just as Kerhostin -just beside- refers to the house of Hasteinn. The combination of these climatic and geographical factors explains why people from the north were so present here. In 1904, the only Viking grave ever discovered in France was excavated in Groix. Archeologist Liliane Tarrou dated the grave from the second part of the tenth century. In fact, she considered the end date of the Viking presence in 940 as being the ideal date for the grave and considered these artefacts were confirming this. In fact, the first Scandinavian specialists contacted in 1908 (G. Gustavsson, Oscar Montelius) considered the grave was from the last third of the ninth century... 870. We believe the chief Asgeir, a close companion of Ragnar, killed on the Loire in 865, was buried there.

The Côtes-d'Armor, Ille-et-Villaine and Loire-Atlantique were also settlement areas. These were in fact 'friendly' regions. Before the treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, which granted the mouth of the Seine to Rollo, the men from the north were allies of the Bretons. Their message was simple: 'The Franks have invaded you. Join us and let's get rid of them together'. Many Bretons joined the clan and became Vikings. Between 847 and 913, several Scandinavians settled in Brittany, probably because they found a wife and good land there. Finistère is less well represented, although we know that the Pays Pagan to the north of Brest was a Viking land where lords of Scandinavian origin practised the law of kelp. Clearly, a methodical study of Finistère place names would reveal many of

Scandinavian origin. Finally, it should be remembered that there are -ac place names in Brittany: Quédillac (Kaetill), Mérillac (Maering), Eréac (Haering), Rouillac (Harold), Sévignac (Sven). This corresponds to a military march where Scandinavians would have settled but felt the need to protect themselves from attack.

In the Morbihan, we note : Baudry (Baldrek). Boger (Botgeir). Falguérec (Falgeirr). Guernio (Geirniut). Erin (Haering). Calvin (Kolbein). Lif (Leif). Martin (Martein). Sigré (Sigraeif). Lesquégué (Skeggi).

### **The Kingdom of Aquitaine.**

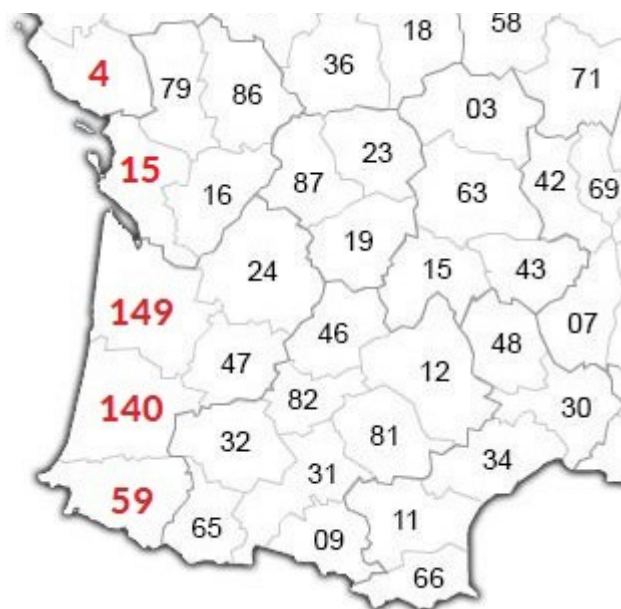
We have chosen to bring together the regions of Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Occitanie, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Centre-Val-de-Loire and the department of Vendée to reconstitute the kingdom of Aquitaine of Pepin II, which was the scene of the defensive alliance that the King of Aquitaine forged with the men of the North. We have chosen to divide the kingdom of Aquitaine into four north-south bands running from the coast to the Rhône valley. The advantage of this approach is that it breaks down the administrative pattern, showing that the density of place names decreases as you move away from the coast. This first group includes five coastal departments. From north to south, we have Vendée (85), Charente Maritime (17), Gironde (33), Landes (40) and the Pyrenees-atlantiques (64).

### **Coastal Aquitaine (17, 33, 40, 64, 85)**

Traditionally, the Norman school of history regards the voyage up the Garonne to Toulouse in 844 as the first incursion into Aquitaine. This is indeed the first mention in the Annals of Saint Bertin. However, if we study Gascon sources, we discover that as early as 840, less than six months after the capture of their ally Pepin II of Aquitaine, the men from the north took control of the left bank of the Garonne. The previous year, Louis the Pious had taken control of Aquitaine on the right bank. It was logical that the emperor, who had been wintering in Poitiers, should take the offensive again in 840, cross the Garonne and invade Gascony. By taking control of Gascony, the Vikings were not seizing this land, they were protecting it from Frankish conquest. A few weeks later, Pepin managed to escape, rejoined Aquitaine and resumed the fight alongside his powerful allies in the north, an alliance that lasted until Pepin's death in 864.

Charente maritime (17): 15 - Gironde (33): 149 - Landes (40): 140 - Pyrénées atlantiques (64): 59 - Vendée (85): 4

**Total: 364.**



Two departments stand out: Gironde and Landes. These departments had a number of advantages for the men of the North: they had desert coasts, they were protected from Frankish attacks by the Garonne and from Saracen attacks by the Pyrenees, they had the largest oak forest in Europe, which was essential for supplying the shipyards, they were located on a strategic maritime route leading to Spain and the Mediterranean, they had three welcoming river mouths: the Garonne, the Dordogne and the Adour: The Garonne, Dordogne and Adour rivers, and a major trade route: the ancient tin route between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. They also had plenty of ore in the Pyrenees and marsh iron in the Landes. All this on fertile land in a pleasant climate. Another advantage was that it was a region torn apart by civil war, where forging alliances was in the interests of both sides. To believe that the men of the North overlooked all these objective qualities and preferred to settle in less favourable climates is not common sense, but blindness.

The Pyrenees-Atlantiques - Basque Country - also has a very large Scandinavian toponymy: four times as many names as the Cotentin! The Vikings settled very early on among the Basques, who probably saw the Scandinavian settlers not as invaders, but as cousins sharing the same culture: primacy of the community, assemblies of free men, centrality of the home, absence of religious proselytism, management of resources, importance of keeping one's word. As for the Scandinavian chieftains, these shipowners who made their fortune in Mediterranean trade, the princes gladly gave them their daughters to marry. Who wouldn't have wanted to have the Elon Musks of their time as sons-in-law?

Scandinavian sources date the arrival of the northerners in the region to the 770s, and Arab sources confirm their presence in the 790s.

Many surnames appear in these toponymic lists. These surnames do not necessarily indicate Scandinavian ancestry, particularly in the Landes and Pyrénées-Atlantiques regions. In fact, the victorious Count of Gascony seems to have forbidden the vanquished of Scandinavian origin from bearing Scandinavian names. The aim was to erase all traces and memories of this pagan past and to erase the Nordic identity of the vanquished. On the other hand, the villages and farms created by the northerners kept their names, which often became patronymics. For example, Dufau, a very Gascon name, could derive from the first name Dufa. This does not mean that the ancestor of the Dufau family was called Dufa, but that their ancestor lived in a house or locality called Dufau, the former farm of a Dufa. Gascon linguists will say that Dufau takes its name from the beech tree. It

could be. As is the Scandinavian origin.

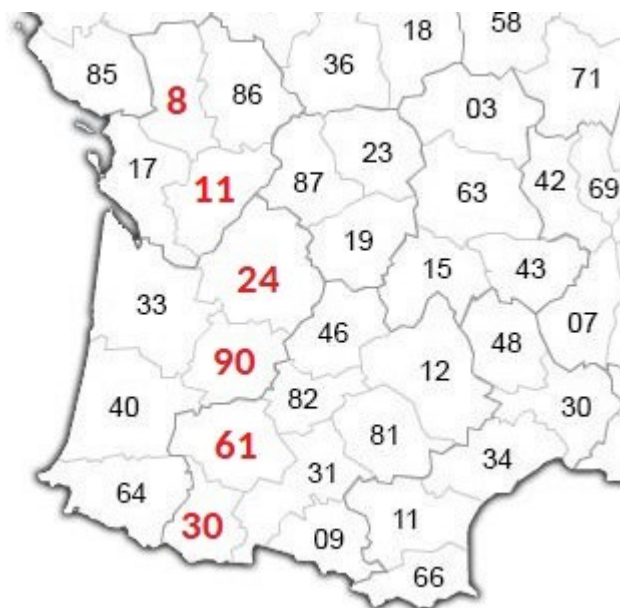
In Charente maritime, we have: Baudry (Baldrek). Bergueuil (Bergulf). Aytrè (Eitri). Corloux (Korlung). Le Magnous (Magnus). Renard (Ragnar). Royan (Ragnar). Les Reigniers (Ragnar). Retaud (Reitharr). Cibard (Sigvard). Civerac (Sigverk). Sorlut (Sorli). Bernon (Björn), Saujon (Soybjörn), Etaules (Stali).

### Second-line Aquitaine (79, 16, 24, 47, 32, 65)

This Aquitaine group, made up of departments bordering the five coastal departments, comprises six departments. These are, from north to south: Deux-Sèvres (79), Charente (16), Dordogne (24), Lot-et-Garonne (47), Gers (32) and Hautes-Pyrénées (65). These second-line departments will attract a huge number of Scandinavian farmers. The Scandinavians weren't going to take over the Gascon villages, they were going to clear unexploited areas and create their own villages. This would explain why there are so many place names of Scandinavian origin. It should be borne in mind that these settlers did not settle as occupants, but with the agreement and probably at the invitation of Pepin II of Aquitaine, who wished to populate his kingdom. These new arrivals were very welcome, as they would bring prosperity and security to a kingdom that had until then been torn apart by civil war and fratricidal struggles between the Franks.

Deux-Sèvres (79) : 8 ; Charente (16) : 11; Dordogne (24) : 24 ; Lot-et-Garonne (47) : 90 ; Gers (32) : 61 ; Hautes-Pyrénées (65): 30 .

**TOTAL : 224.**



Lot-et-Garonne, a department that borders on Landes and Gironde, comes out on top. The capital, Agen, was an important crossroads on the Roman road from Périgueux to Pamplona. Agen was nicknamed the Gateway to Aquitaine by travellers arriving from the south. Agen was also a crossing point between Bordeaux and Toulouse, between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Add to this its excellent agricultural land and climate, and it's easy to see why farmers from the north settled here in droves.

The Gers is also very well represented. The Gers is the department where the most important functional civil toponymy has been discovered, with derivatives of kaupang (Caupenne d'Armagnac),



markad (Marcadet), althing (Antin) and mjäl (Miélan).

The place names of the Dordogne and Hautes-Pyrénées have also been strongly influenced by the presence of people from the North. In the Dordogne, the Franks were present in the Isle valley (Périgueux), where the Roman road passed, so the people from the north chose to pass through and settle in the neighbouring Dordogne valley (Bergerac). This toponymy suggests that the men from the north did not seek to arm-wrestle the powers that be or take over the Roman roads. They settled where there was room and created their own road network in the valleys ignored by the Roman roads.

The Hautes-Pyrénées is an interesting case in point: toponymists and historians assume that the invaders settled in the rich agricultural land and pushed the primitive populations back into the mountains. In their view, Pyrenean place names are therefore very old and indigenous. However, this belief is based on nothing more than an assumption: that the invaders were farmers in search of land. This was indeed the case with the Scandinavians, but place names and history suggest that far from expropriating the indigenous population, they settled among the Gascons. On the other hand, the men of the North, and in particular their chiefs, were kings of the seas, i.e. shipowners who made their fortune in trade. These chieftains did not see the Pyrenees as a harsh wasteland, but rather as lush valleys giving access to rich Spain and the Mediterranean world. The people of the north, who were mainly farmers and mountain dwellers - at least those from Norway and Sweden - looked on the Pyrenees with great fondness and settled there en masse, as can be seen from their place names.

To the north, the Charente was also a land of colonisation, but being on a bank more exposed to Frankish attacks, it was no doubt less coveted. The Charentes was more marked by military toponymy (gatborg/Gatebourse) and toponymy linked to the slave trade (trelleborg/ Taillebourg, Treillebois).

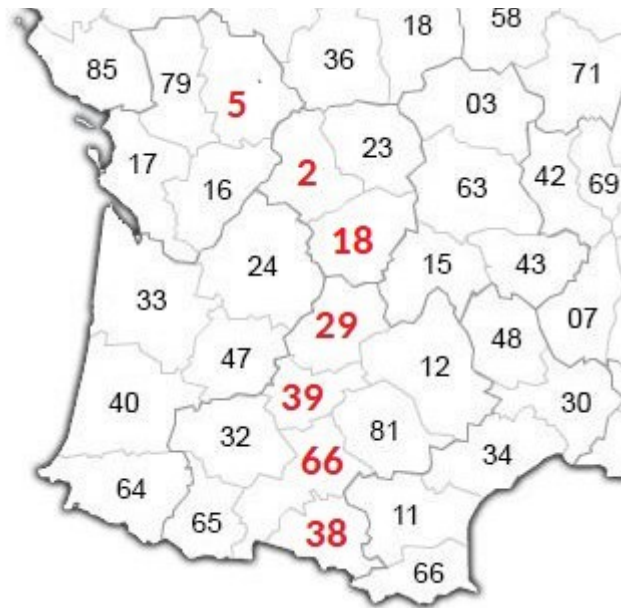
In Charente, we find : Baret (Bard). Brette (Breith). Les Gauterets (Gautrath). Audebert (Oddbjörn). La Romegère (Ormgeir). Roule (Hrolf). Tonne (Tunni). Vacheresse (Vakri). Saint-Groux (Asgeir). Aigre (Asgeir). Vindelle (Vandill).

### **Third-line Aquitaine (86, 87, 19, 46, 82, 31, 09)**

This group comprises seven third-line departments. From north to south, it includes Vienne (86), Haute-Vienne (87), Corrèze (19), Lot (46), Tarn-et-Garonne (82), Haute-Garonne (31) and Ariège (09).

Ariège (09): 38, Corrèze (19): 18, Haute-Garonne (31): 66, Lot (46): 29, Tarn-et-Garonne (82): 39, Vienne (86): 5, Hautz-Vienne (87): 2

**TOTAL: 196**



The breakdown is much the same as for the second-line départements. The four southern départements are the most marked by Scandinavian place names. Ariège and Haute-Garonne, the two Pyrenean départements, have more than a hundred place names. The Garonne and Ariège valleys were strategic for the people of the north. Functional place names reveal that Scandinavian trade reached rich Spain via the Val d'Aran (Garonne) and the Puymorens Pass (Ariège). This trade was dominated by the slave trade, as the toponymy reveals.

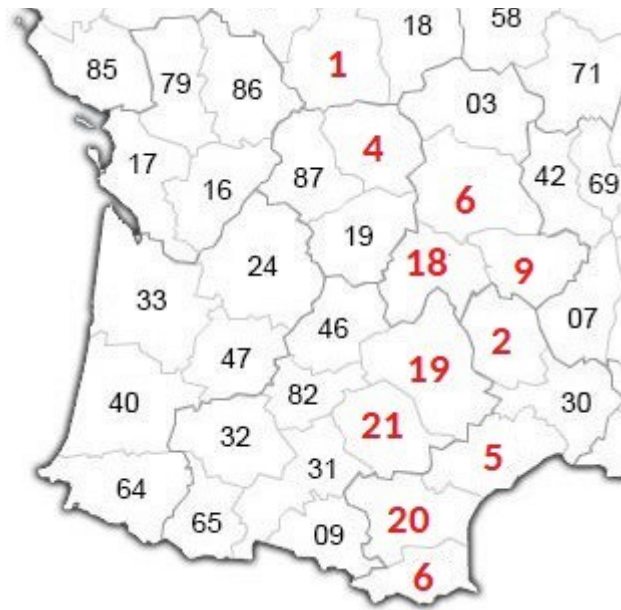
Tarn-et-Garonne, Lot and Corrèze were also heavily populated by men from the north. Because of polygamy and the resulting low infant mortality rate (wives looked after each other), northerners had large families, but little arable land in Scandinavia. Their children had to leave to find land worth clearing. Initially, they didn't look for this land in Iceland or the wind-battered islands of the North Atlantic, but in the most beautiful province of the Roman Empire, Aquitaine. In Haute-Vienne, the number of place names is falling drastically. We believe that when the number of place names falls below five, the département can no longer be considered a land of settlement. In Corrèze, we have identified : Magnoux (Magnus or Manni). Faugères (Falgeirr). Aumont (Audmund). Frémont (Fridmund). Gauch (Gauk). Navarre (Nattfari). Renard (Ragnar). Roux (Hro). Simon (Sigmund). Favard (Havard). Banne (Vaeni). Bellegarde (Valgard). Eynard (Einarr). Favars (Havarr). Rambard (Rafnsvart). Sialve (Sialfi). Escurotte (Skraut). Saumon (Solmund).

#### Fourth-line Aquitaine (36, 23, 63, 15, 43, 48, 12, 81, 34, 11, 66)

This group includes no less than eleven départements, but we could have added others. From north to south, we have Indre (36), Creuse (23), Puy-de-Dôme (63), Cantal (15), Haute-Loire (43), Lozère (48), Aveyron (12), Tarn (81), Hérault (34); Aude (11) and Pyrénées-orientales (66).

Aude (11): 20, Aveyron (12): 19, Cantal (15): 18, Creuse (23): 4, Hérault (34): 5, Indre (36): 1, Haute-Loire (43): 12, Lozère (48): 2, Puy-de-Dôme (63): 6, Pyrénées-orientales (66): 6, Tarn (81): 21.

**TOTAL : 114**



Once again, the southern départements have the most Germanic place names. Aude, Tarn, Aveyron and Cantal. These departments all have more Scandinavian place names than the departments in the north of France, including Normandy. Haute-Loire is also rich in place names of possible Scandinavian origin. It is possible that this isolated, sparsely-populated region close to the Rhône valley - like Ardèche (07), Gard (30) and Drôme (26) - combined qualities that appealed to northerners.

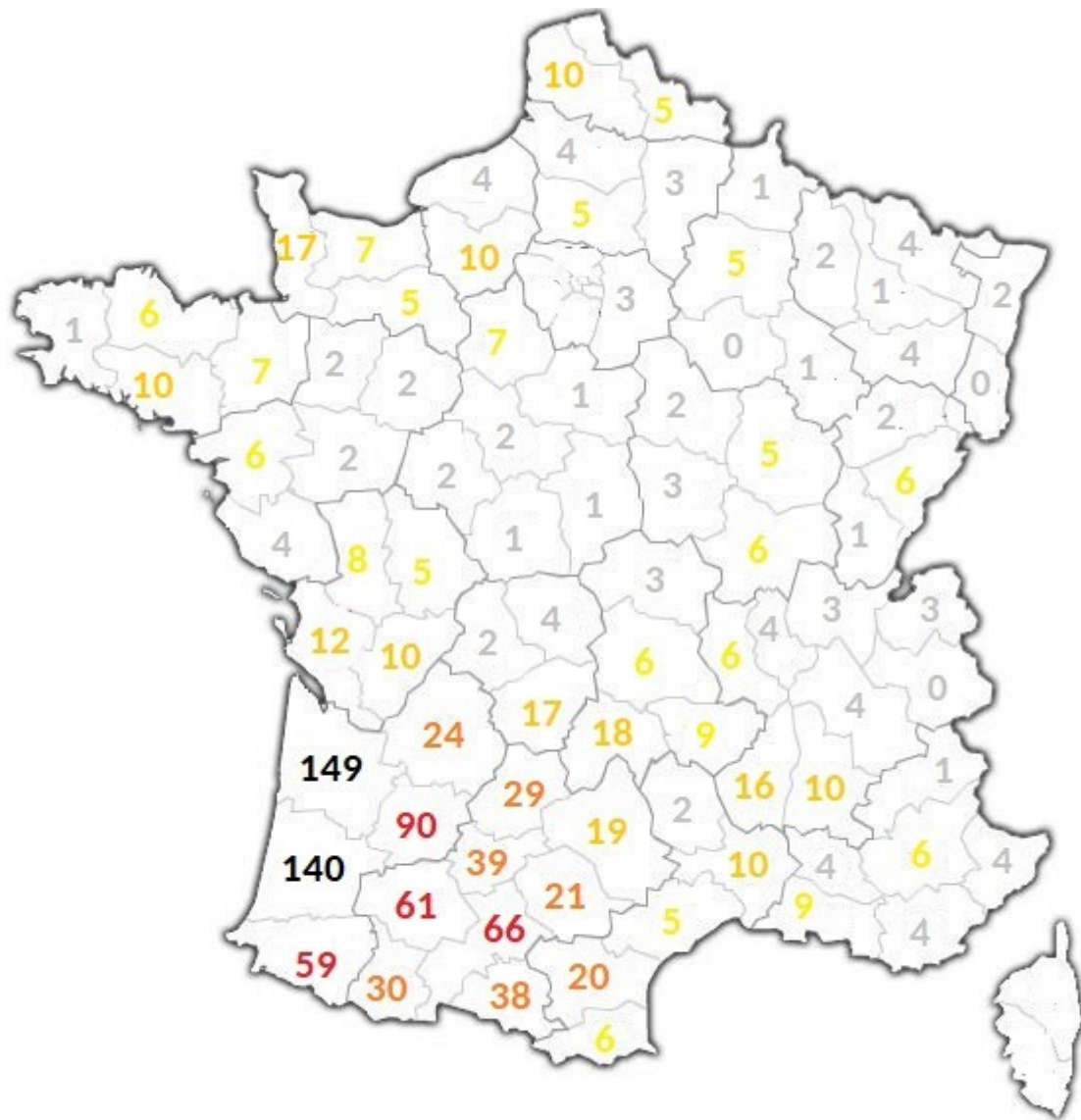
In Haute-Loire, we have identified : Gerbarie (Geirvarr). Courbon (Kolbjörn). Lodines (Lothin). Martin (Martein). Rambert (Rannver). Raucoule (Raskulf). Ricoule (Rikulf). Ringuet (Hring). Veyrines (Vaering).

### Interpretation.

#### The north-east.

If these Germanic place names were of Frankish origin, we would have expected the north-east to be well represented. However, in the north-east quarter, only three départements have more than five place names of possible Scandinavian origin. We repeat, we cannot guarantee that all these place names are Scandinavian, or even that they are contemporary with the Scandinavian period. There is nothing to stop a Norman with a Scandinavian name marrying an Alsatian and settling on the banks of the Rhine. It is likely that many place names were created in this way and are in no way indicative of Scandinavian colonisation. But these are statistics, and statistics don't lie. Even with an error of 30%, the trends it gives mean something. The rarity of 'Scandinavian' place names in north-eastern France seems to mean that they are different from place names of Frankish origin, a Frankish presence that was undoubtedly significant in this region.





### Normandy and Brittany.

If this toponymy had been Scandinavian, we were prepared to see Normandy and Brittany, proven Scandinavian colonial areas, over-represented. However, only four departments in the northern half of France have more than ten place names. Morbihan (11) in Brittany, Manche (17) and Eure (10) in Normandy, Pas-de-Calais (62) in the Hauts-de-France were all areas where people from the North settled. Their early presence in the Manche (Cotentin) and Morbihan (Quiberon) regions can be explained by the Viking bases there from the start of the invasions. At the time of the invasions, Brittany's coastline was deserted. The Roman villas and their harbours were abandoned. People from the North settled on this neglected coastline and were able to live in good neighbourliness with the Breton farmers living at the bottom of the Abers. It was the Scandinavian settlers who taught the descendants of the Osismes, Vénètes and Coriosolités, the Celtic peoples defeated by Julius Caesar and forbidden to sail by Caesar, how to sail again.

In the Pas-de-Calais, the estuaries of the Canche and of the L'Authie were places of settlement. In Somme, Régnière-L'Ecluse (Ragnar) and Bernay-en-Ponthieu (Björn) seem to indicate an early base in the area.

## Burgundy

There are three departments in the east of Burgundy with more than five place names. Saône-et-Loire, Côte-d'Or and Doubs. The presence of a few Scandinavian settlers could be explained by two facts: the first is that the men from the North had no difficulty in travelling to this region, which was in the kingdom of Lothaire, their ally. Of course, they did not travel by boat, but on horseback. Secondly, European trade, particularly the slave trade, passed through Verdun-sur-le-Doubs<sup>2</sup> and Chalon-sur-Saône. Scandinavian traders were bound to take an interest in this strategic region and visit it regularly. These men might have settled in these territories after meeting their wives. In Saône-et-Loire, we have Simard (Sigmarr), Armond and Armont (Armund), Autun (Audunn), Almont (Hallmund). In Doubs, Frémont (Fridmund), Canot (Knott). Renard (Ragnar), Vacheresse (Vakri). In Côte-d'Or, Rolle (Hrolf), Saux (Saxi). Ongles (Ongli), Semond (Saemund) and Esbarres (Svar). Autun, Canot, Renard, Vacheresse and Saux are ambiguous place names, some people may rightly point out. They are, but they appear in the results lists and taking them into account is part of the statistical principle.

## The south-east and the Mediterranean.

Seeing so many place names appear in the Drôme, Ardèche and Gard is a surprise, but a logical one. Not in the reading grid of the Norman school, but in mine.

The men from the north who settled in Gascony and took control of the tin route between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean sought to gain a monopoly on north-south trade. To achieve this, they had to prevent competing routes through the Rhone Valley and the Alpine passes from prospering. This trade was fed by the ports of Marseille and Venice. The Scandinavian presence in Provence could be explained by the Gascony clan's desire to control commercial traffic in the Rhône valley. Their presence is all the more likely given that we are in the kingdom of Lothaire, who had no hesitation in using Scandinavian auxiliaries, who were more reliable than the Franks, to hold strategic regions. The Scandinavian presence is suggested by a mention in the Annals of Saint Bertin. In 860, Vikings from the Camargue seized Arles (Bouches-du-Rhône) and Nîmes (Gard), then Valence and Romans-sur-Isère, both in the Drôme. The Annals of Saint Bertin go on to say: 'The Danes, who were on the Rhone, went towards Italy, taking and devastating Pisa and other cities'. Historiography takes this line to mean that the Danes reembarked and left Provence to continue their expedition. However, at no point does the text say that they set sail again. Historians who do so are merely speculating. Logically, the Vikings reached Pisa by following the via Aurelia, the Roman coastal route... This is logical, since the fleet that had landed them in Provence had sailed for Constantinople, where it was at the same time as Hastein's victory at Luna. The Scandinavian troops then turned back and headed for the Rhône valley. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the Annals of Saint Bertin. The following year, 861, the annals mention: 'Charles (the Bald) [...] advanced into Burgundy with his wife as far as the city of Mâcon. He was called upon by some (Frankish counts) against the Normans to take dominion of Provence, where Charles, son of the late emperor Lothaire, was uselessly and damagingly bearing the name and honours of royalty; but things not being very prosperous for him, after having committed many depredations on the people of the country, he returned to his palace at Pontion'. This text tells us that in 861, far from having left, the Scandinavians remained in the region, presumably to support their ally, Charles, son of Lothaire who died in 855. The place names of the Drôme, Ardèche and Gard seem to confirm that Charles de Provence's allies took their mission of support seriously and made it a long-term one. This hospitality is not just speculation. After Lothaire's death, his sons continued to welcome their Nordic

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2 Charles Verlinden believed Verdun on the Meuse to be the slave trade hub, but obviously, as suggests Youval Rothman, Verdun-sur-le Doubs was the real hub. In 2023, slave shackles have been discovered by archaeologists in the river.

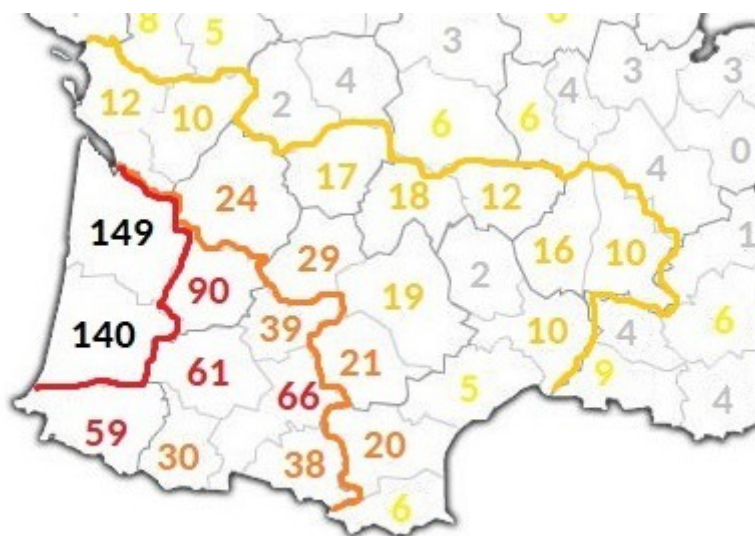
allies.

In 866, the Annals of Saint Bertin wrote: 'The Normans (who had been on the Seine until then) set sail in the month of July, and some of them settled for a time in a canton of Italy and, by an agreement with Lothaire (son of Lothaire I), enjoyed it at his will'. Some historians claim that the Vikings only entered the Mediterranean once, between 859 and 862. The Annals of Saint Bertin clearly state the opposite. Yet another piece of information carefully swept under the historiographical carpet. Mediterranean place names from the eastern Pyrenees to the Maritime Alps suggest that a few people from the north settled on the shores of the Mediterranean. Incidentally, this toponymy confirms that the Viking fleets entering the Mediterranean were not alone in a distant sea, as has always been thought. Most historians consider that Nantes was the closest 'Viking port' to the Mediterranean. But not only did the northerners have ports in Aquitaine (Bayonne, Capbreton, Mimizan, Bordeaux and Royan), they also had ports in the Mediterranean held by their allies: Pepin II of Aquitaine and Lothair. These included Narbonne, Arles, Marseille, Genoa and Ostia.

The existence of these friendly ports completely changed the Viking situation in the Mediterranean. Until now, historians considered that the Viking fleets that entered the Mediterranean were on a one-off expedition, a safari for glory and booty. With home ports, supply points and trading ports, the men of the North could undertake a genuine naval and commercial policy in the Mediterranean. The Vikings, although this may offend some, were involved in the slave trade. They transported their captives from the British Isles to the Mediterranean via Aquitaine. The value of a slave quadrupled between the north and south shores of the inland sea as McCormick tells us. The Vikings would have taken all the risks to capture and transport their captives to the shores of the Mediterranean and would have given up three quarters of the profits in favour of local sea carriers... This is economic and commercial nonsense. The Vikings of Gascony logically had their own transport fleets protected by war fleets operating in the Mediterranean. This is a working hypothesis, but the few texts that mention 'Saracen piracy' in the Mediterranean provide some support.

### The Kingdom of Aquitaine

This map, with its contour lines, shows a significant amount of Germanic toponymy in Gascony. This has long been noted, but attributed to the Visigoths. But this hypothesis must be rejected for three reasons.



When the Visigoths were entrusted with the province of Aquitaine by their Roman patrons in 412,

they had been Latinised and Romanised for over a century. The capital of the Visigothic kingdom was Toulouse. So that's where the epicentre of this toponymic geography should have been, but that's not the case. The figures clearly show that the further you get from the coast, the rarer the place names become. This means that the authors of this Germanic toponymy came from the sea, which was not the case for the Visigoths who arrived from Spain. The Visigoths were not the originators of this Germanic toponymy.

Not many of them came from the sea. The Gascon, Italian and Frankish sources unambiguously refer to people from the north and the place names we have highlighted also refer to them. I'll pass over the Gascon traditions that can be linked to the Scandinavian world: the use of clinker in shipbuilding, the right of kelp, the inheritance law that produced the famous 'cadets de Gascogne', the assemblies of free men, the Bihore rallying cry, the counterpart of the Norman Haro, the Nordic frames of Landes houses, whale hunting, the Agots de Gascogne etc... Two departments are far ahead of the rest: Gironde (mouths of the Garonne and Dordogne rivers) and Landes (mouth of the Adour river). Unsurprisingly, sources point to the presence of Scandinavians in the region as early as the 770s.

### **Conclusion.**

Scandinavian chieftains were Saekonnug, seakings, in other words shipowners and merchants who constantly calculated the return on their investment. They knew how to invest in fleets, buy loyalty and forge alliances. They were well informed not only about the geographical and commercial configuration of Europe, but also about the political dissensions that were tearing their adversaries apart. It was therefore very easy for them to find allies. All they had to do was meet their enemies' enemies and offer them alliances. To believe that illiterate, undisciplined raiders would succeed for two centuries in upsetting the kingdoms of the West, wiping out the English kingdoms and sounding the death knell of the Carolingian Empire without a minimum of premeditation and organisation is extremely naive, if not blind.

This toponymy based on Scandinavian first names alone gives substance to the view that Aquitaine, and behind it the Mediterranean, was the real epicentre of the invasions of the West. Obviously, those who think that only Normandy and the British Isles were of interest to the men of the North cannot accept this new interpretation of the question. This toponymy not only reveals a large-scale settlement in the south, but also indicates that the Viking invasions of the West, far from being an anarchic flood of plunderers as was theorised over a century ago, were a war waged by a clan of Viking tribes, a clan based in Gascony, a clan linked to King Harald Wartooth, uncle of King Sigurd Ring, himself the father of Ragnar Lodbrok, father of Björn Ragnarson, the man who reached Alexandria and took Constantinople in 860.

Finally, and to drive the point home, this colonial place-name system, which I'm sure some will find absurd, can be compared with the functional colonial place-name system, based on place-names meaning market (kaupang, markad), mill (mjälhus) and assembly (thing, thingvell, althing). If this functional colonial cartography is consistent with the patronymic colonial cartography we have just described, then any doubts about the value of this statistical approach will be swept away.

Can Scandinavian place names constitute historical evidence? The answer is obvious. On the other hand, it is certain that if this evidence contradicts the historical academic discourse, few historians will consider it to be serious evidence. As for the toponymists, either they reject my conclusions and therefore recognise that toponymy will never be anything other than poetry that can be made to say whatever you want, or they admit that my rational approach has a certain legitimacy and will



have to admit that they have missed the obvious. Not an easy task.

I invite historians and toponymists to propose another interpretation of this distribution of place names, if they have one.