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Viking Maritime Heritage in Normandy from a British Isles Perspective[1]

In three articles which appeared over twenty years ago Professor Lucien Musset brought to light linguistic traces left by the Vikings in Normandy within a maritime context.[2] Legal rights as well as technical vocabulary found amongst the Normandy coastal population, especially whalers and salters, still bore a clear Scandinavian imprint in the eleventh and twelfth century. More recently Professor René Lepelley has written about maritime toponymy of Scandinavian origin from the region of Val-de-Saire (Barfleur) in the north of the Cotentin peninsula, a region of dense Scandinavian settlement. Close study of the names of rocks, bays and seamarks along its coast, has not only allowed him 'to detect Vikings there, but also to re-discover their navigational practices'.[3]

From these studies it would appear that at a certain period the whole Normandy littoral was entirely Scandinavian. However, in order to reach such a conclusion it is necessary to collect all the toponymic evidence from the Normandy coast, to record nautical vocabulary from early Norman texts, and to collect dialectal vocabulary relating to fishing. Up until now all this information has rarely been assembled, but it is only by doing so that solid conclusions can be arrived at. An important move towards such a synthesis was made by Professor Jean Renaud in an article entitled 'L'héritage maritime norrois en Normandie';[4] this article, albeit very short, is a good starting-point for our study.

This Viking maritime heritage is however important enough to be the subject at present of a doctoral thesis.[5] This article intends to present an overview of this work, as well as giving some concrete examples. These examples will be taken from the three principal chapters which make up the thesis: the boat, fishing, and toponymy. At the same time an attempt

will always be made to place Normandy in its wider northern context by comparing the data with that of Great Britain and Ireland.
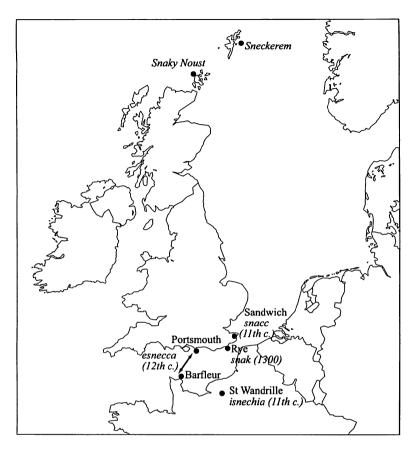
The Ship

The linguistic material concerning the ship is extremely revealing of Scandinavian influence. It is remarkable on two counts. Firstly the majority of the words collected are very old, being dateable to between the eleventh and the fourteenth century. Secondly they constitute an especially coherent vocabulary which covers almost every aspect of the ship. We can in fact derive from Old Scandinavian the names of types of boats, as well as technical terms relating to boat-building, rigging and crew. Rather than enumerate a whole list of words, one representative example will be studied in some detail: *snekkja* 'war-ship', a word adopted into Old French.

The word *snekkja*, cognate with English 'snake', and evoking the movement of that animal in the water, was used according to the sagas for a war-ship belonging to the *langskip* (longship) class, and having twenty oar-benches, *tvitugesessa*.[6]

Place:	Recorded form:
Normandy (11th century)	*isnechia*
Old Norman (12th century)	*esneque*
Old English (11th century)	*snacc*
Middle English (13th century)	*snak*
Orkney (toponym)	Snaky Noust
Shetland (toponym)	Sneckerem

The word *isnechia* is attested in Normandy in a hagiographic document, 'The Miracles of St Vulfran', which dates from the last quarter of the eleventh century, probably 1075-1085. The author of the miracles, a monk of Saint Wandrille, recounts

Map 1: Distribution of words derived from Old Norse *snekkja* both as an appellative and as a place-name element in the British Isles and Normandy.

DETAILS and LEGEND
Sandwich: from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.
Rye: one of the Cinque Ports.
St Wandrille: from the *Miracula Sancti Vulfranni*.
Orkney and Shetland: place-names.

↔ Main route of the *esnecca regis*, the ship of the kings of England and the dukes of Normandy in the twelfth century.

that the crew of a ship which had turned turtle in the Seine estuary were saved by a large barque, after having prayed to St Vulfran: *ecce repente ingens paro, qui lingua barbara isnechia vocatur, apparuit.*[7] This account is brief but we learn from it much regarding the use of the word *isnechia* and its meaning.

Let us examine first of all some linguistic aspects. In French the consonantal group /sk/ in initial position gives rise to a prothetic vowel in order to facilitate pronunciation; hence **i-snekkja*. In Germanic loan-words borrowed after the second century AD this vowel takes on the quality /e/, but when it is followed by a vowel with the same quality it can become /i/ e.g. Old French *isnel* derived from Germanic *snell* 'quick, fast'. Despite this, the attested forms in the twelfth century all have intitial *e*, such as *esneque*. Given that the monk was writing in Latin, one is tempted to see in the word *isnechia* a Latinised form of a Norman word. The monk is very clear that it belongs to the 'lingua barbara' , that is to say the vernacular language of the local population, as opposed to the scholarly language of Latin. Also the word *isnechia* was the contemporary form used in eleventh-century Normandy, a form very close to its Scandinavian etymon.

Is there any relationship between the word and the type of ship? In medieval Latin texts, such as chronicles or accounts, ships are generally indifferently called *naves*, so that we can deduce nothing about their type. Nonetheless the monk who compiled these miracles took care to use another noun *paro*, which must have seemed to him closest to the type of ship designated by the Old Scandinavian *snekkja*. This Latin word is a loan-word from Greek *parón* and designated in antiquity a small war-vessel especially used by pirates.[8] Moreover this *paro* is qualified by the adjective *ingens* 'huge', and not simply by *magnus*, 'big'. Thanks to the precise nature of this description we can deduce that the *isnechia* was a war-ship of a size large enough for it to be a *langskip*. There can be no doubt that there is a correspondence between the loan-word and what it designates. The monk seemed therefore to know perfectly well what kind of boat the *snekkja* was quite simply because he must have seen such ships sailing the Seine, just as

his story indicates.

As we have seen the most common form of this word in the twelfth century is *esneque,* with some orthographic variations. Norman historiographers of this period inform us above all about the people who used this boat-type: the Normans and the English.[9] A text of especial interest because it is contemporary with the events which it describes, *L'Estoire de la Guerre Sainte,* narrates that the fleet of Richard I of England (Lion-Heart) was made up essentially of *esneques* (often written *enekes*) during the Third Crusade (1190-92). It is told that these ships could be used to transport horses:

Li reis la nuit sans plus targer
Fist tanz de chevals descharger
Cum enz es eneques avoit.[10]

Even more revealing are the diplomatic sources which indicate the existence of a ship called *esnecca* used by the dukes of Normandy and the kings of England on their numerous crossings of the Channel in the twelfth century. This boat-type regularly made the crossing between the northern Cotentin and the south of England, especially between Barfleur and Portsmouth. According to John le Patourel there is no doubt that the word *esnecca* designates a type of boat rather than a proper noun, and must be 'a ship of Viking type of more than ordinary size and very rapid, using both oar and sail'.[11]

The office which looked after this ship was called *ministerium de esnecca* and seems to have been inherited from William the Conqueror.[12] Furthermore the word *esnecca* attested in the Pipe Rolls of the English Exchequer from the reigns of Henry I, Henry II and Richard I,[13] probably represents a Latinised form of the Old French *esneque*. The *e* in front of the consonantal group *-sn* makes this a typically French word. As English did not have this phonetic trait, it is clear that the word was introduced into England with the Norman Conquest.

However the English on their part, and before the

Conquest, had also borrowed the Old Scandinavian *snekkja* in the form *snacc*. It is undeniable that the English had acquired many nautical practices from their contact with the Danes. This is, for example, perfectly clearly illustrated in the Bayeux Tapestry, which shows the ships both of William and Harold as authentic Viking vessels. Thus in the eleventh century the English and the Normans must have used the same kinds of ship, and in particular the *esneque*. We learn from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, at the year 1052, that King Edward had forty of these ships (*snacca*) armed in wait at Sandwich. In 1066, according to the same source, Tostig sailed to Scotland with twelve long-ships (*snaccum*).[14] In 1299 in England there is a record of a ship with the proper name *Le Snack*; while in 1300 we find two ships referred to by the appellative *snak*, one of which was based at the southern English ports of Rye.[15] In France the word *esneque* seems also to have remained in use until the thirteenth century.[16]

In the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland it is in the toponymy that we find traces of the etymon *snekkja*. John Stewart has noted the Shetland place-name Sneckerem (*Sneckrom* 1806). This earlier form allows us to assume an original *snekkjuhöfn, 'harbour of the snekkja'.[17] In Orkney Hugh Marwick has recorded the place-name Snaky Noust, which contains the Old Scandinavian *naust*, 'shelter for a boat'.[18] It is interesting to note that in Denmark there are several place-names which were natural harbours in the Viking Age and whose names incorporate *snekkja*.[19]

It is therefore quite reasonable to maintain that boats of the *snekkja* type were used from Shetland to Normandy in the Viking Age and perhaps beyond. (See Map 1.)

The attestation of the Old Russian word *shneka*[20] adds a further dimension to this corpus of words and names: in their expansion the Vikings left behind a very characteristic nautical vocabulary. The case of England and Normandy is particularly interesting because as a result of the Norman Conquest these two countries exerted a mutual influence on one another. This in turn may well have reinforced certain nautical practices which each country had inherited separately from the Vikings.
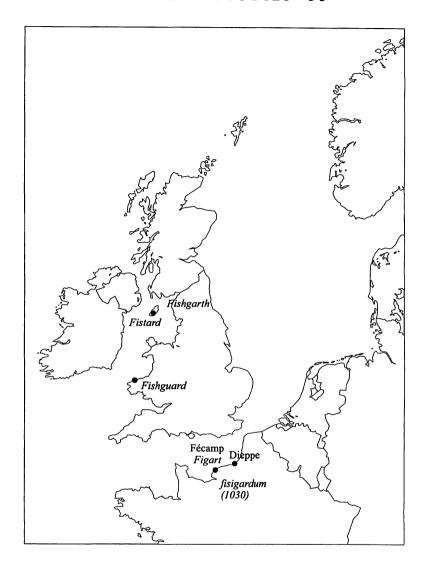
Fishing

The realm of fishing in Normandy, as with the realm of boats, has been exposed to important Scandinavian influence. This influence is equally varied, since traces of Norse are found in the vocabulary of coastal fishing (shell-fish and crustaceans), of sea fishing (fish and marine mammals), of fishing equipment (nets and enclosures for catching fish), of marine produce (seaweed and salt), and of maritime law (wrecks). I want to focus on one particular Norse fishing-term: *fiskigarðr*.

The Skåne Law, compiled in Old Danish in 1210, mentions enclosures for catching fish called *fiskigarð[r]*. This means literally 'fish enclosure'.[21] The early attestation of this word in Normandy and its presence in the toponymy of Great Britain make it likely that this kind of fishing existed during the Viking Age in both places. (See Map 2.)

Place:	Recorded form:
Normandy (11th century)	*fisigardum*
Normandy (toponym)	Figart
England (15th century)	*fysshgarth*
England (toponym)	Fishgarth
Wales (toponym)	Fishguard
Isle of Man (toponym)	Fistard

We find the word *fiskigarð[r]* in Normandy in the Latinised form *fisigardum*, attested at Dieppe in an act of Robert the Magnificent of 1030.[22] This Latin word obviously presupposes the existence of a Norman dialect word *fisigard* for 'enclosure for catching fish'. The act makes no attempt to translate this word and therefore we can assume that it must have been a perfectly understandable and current term in early eleventh-century Normandy, at least in Dieppe, where it is recorded. This would seem no longer to be the case at the beginning of the thirteenth century, where the word is found only as a toponym, as is indicated by the place-name Figart, the name of a field near Fécamp recorded in 1238.[23]

Map 2: The distribution of *fiskigarð* as a place-name element and an appellative in the British Isles and Normandy.
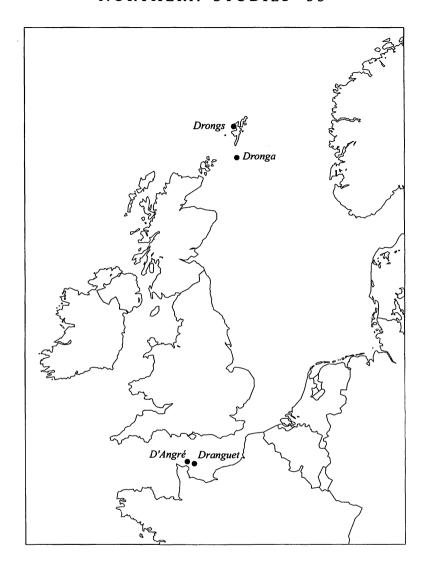
The English language has also adopted the Old Scandinavian word in the form *fishgarth*, obviously very close to its etymon, hardly surprising given the close relationship between these two Germanic languages. The word is first recorded in 1454 (*fysshgarth*). It also appears in the Cumberland compound place-name Fishgarth Holme (1626).[24] The word is also found in place-names in Wales and the Isle of Man. In Wales we find Fishguard (Pembrokeshire), earliest attested form Fissigart (c. 1200);[25] in the Isle of Man we find Fistard.

Maritime Toponomy

Islands, rocks, headlands and other features which go to make up the coastal landscape were important navigational points for seafarers. It is therefore scarcely surprising to find a good number of coastal toponyms around the British Isles which derive from Old Scandinavian.

Normandy has rarely been studied for its coastal toponyms and microtoponyms. At the *Congrès du Millénaire de la Normandie*, the proceedings of which were published in 1912, which celebrated the thousandth anniversary of the creation of Normandy in 911, Charles Joret cited several names of bays and rocks of Scandinavian derivation. These names were taken up again by Jean Renaud in his work *Les Vikings et la Normandie*, which appeared in 1989.[26] We had to wait for the article of René Lepelley, published in 1993, for a meticulous study of the Scandinavian maritime toponymy of Normandy.[27] This study presented the evidence for important Scandinavian influence especially on the toponymy of the coast-line of Val-de-Saire (Barfleur). Here we find the names of rocks which derive from *sker* ('skerry'), the names of bays which derive from *vík* ('bay'), the names of islets which derive from *holmr* ('low-lying island, lowland beside water'). The Norman place-name Dranguet, which derives from Old Scandinavian *drangr*, offers particularly interesting links with Great Britain. (See Map 3.)

The appellative *drangr* denotes in Old Scandinavian a

Map 3: Drangr in the place-names of the British Isles and Normandy.

pointed or sheer rock. This noun, not found in the toponymy (or the topography) of Denmark, is typically Norwegian, and is found, according to W.F.H. Nicolaisen, above all in the coastal region of Agder-Rogaland.[28]

Place:	Recorded form:
Normandy (Cotentin)	Dranguet, D'Angré
Shetland	Drongs, Dronga

At the head-land of Val-de-Saire there is a group of rocks called Rochers de Dranguet (Réville). The addition of the word *rochers* ('rocks') shows that the original meaning of the name Dranguet had been long since forgotten. This confirms the presence of another toponym discovered by Professor Lepelley, Rocher d'Angré (Néville). Apart from the addition of the word *rocher*, this form shows a metathesis which renders the Scandinavian etymon almost invisible.[29] It also seems that there was never a common noun in Norman French which existed alongside these toponyms. Thus these names must have been given at the start of the Viking settlement period, when Old Scandinavian was still being spoken. Later, when the meaning of the etymon had been completely lost, the word *drangr* survived as a proper noun.

In Shetland the appellative *drangr* is found in several toponyms and refers to various kinds of rocks:[30]
a) High rocks rising sheer above the sea, such as the two rocks called Drongs in St Magnus Bay, Hillswick.
b) The highest point of a headland: Drengi.
c) Rocky headland, rocks: Dronga, Drongiteng (> *dranga-tangi*).

It is this last meaning which fits the Rochers de Dranguet, rocks in the middle of a sandy beach, which are important not for their height but for their extent. It is revealing that old marine charts always refer to them as *pointe* ('point'):

> *Le Neptune Français*, 1693: Pointe de Dranguet.
> Cassini, 18th century: Pointe du Dranguet.
> *Pilote Français*, 1836, n° 846: Pointe et Roches Dranguet.

It is rare to find in Normandy a toponym which indicates the nationality of the Vikings, and it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions on the basis of a single name. Nevertheless although the majority of the Vikings who settled in Normandy were Danish, the presence of Norwegians in the company of Rollo, who it is now suggested was himself Norwegian, cannot be ruled out.[31] Another theory, even more likely, asserts that Norwegians would have arrived independently of Rollo, by way of the Irish Sea from settlements in western Britain, Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides, Man and Ireland, as the presence of Gaelic and Irish personal names in the Cotentin attests. Digulleville in le Hague incorporates the Irish name *Dicuil*; Doncanville in Val-de-Saire contains the Scottish name *Duncan*; and Néhou comes from the Scandinavian *Njáls-holmr*, 'Njál's Islet', whose first element is a Gaelic personal name well attested in both Ireland and Iceland. This theory, put forward by Lucien Musset twenty years ago, has since been confirmed by Gillian Fellows-Jensen in an article on the Scandinavian toponymy of Normandy.[32]

Therefore it is hardly surprising to find a typically Norwegian topographic name in the toponymy of Normandy. However, it would be necessary to confirm the Norwegian origin of certain maritime names such as *grunnr* 'sea-bottom', which has given the common noun *grunne* in the Department of La Manche, and which is well attested in Shetland (Herdagrun, Groin) and on the west coast of Scotland (Gruinard); and *kerlingr* 'witch, wizard', used to denote rocks as for example Carling in Orkney and Carlingford in Ireland, and which might be the origin of the name of the rock Queslingue near Alderney in the Channel Isles.[33]

Conclusion

The heritage of the Vikings in Normandy is mainly linguistic and is not merely restricted to the maritime domain. The lack of convincing archaeological remains contrast strongly with these clear and compelling linguistic remains. There are more

such remains to be discovered, and there is much work still to be done in fully evaluating them. In this article I hope to have shown British readers that Normandy is a fascinating area of study and that comparisons with the British Isles can prove fruitful. On both sides of the English Channel we have a common heritage left to us by the same Viking invaders.

My doctoral thesis as presented in this article is part of a European Community project, the Raphaël Programme. This project is similarly entitled 'Viking Maritime Heritage in western Europe (Great Britain, Ireland and France)'. Not only is this project European, it is also multi-disciplinary (history, archaeology, linguistics, dialectology, toponymics, contemporary boat construction), and should lead to a general assessment of the notion of heritage by attempting to answer the question: what remains of the Vikings on the maritime level in the former Scandinavian settlements of western Europe. This project was entirely devised by the author. It is a way to deepen and concretise an academic undertaking, and above all to share knowledge.[34]

Notes

1. Translated from French by Simon Taylor, I am very grateful to Dr Taylor for his work.
2. Lucien Musset, 'Quelques notes sur les baleiniers normands du Xè au XIIIè siècle', *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, XLII, 1964, pp. 147-161.
    Ibid, 'L'héritage maritime des Scandinaves II. Les sauniers', *Heimdal*, XVII, 1975, pp. 13-19.
    Ibid, 'Les apports scandinaves dans le plus ancien droit normand', *Droit privé et institutions régionales*, 1976, pp. 559-575.
    These articles were re-published in *Nordica et Normannica*, Société des Etudes Nordiques, Paris, 1997, pp. 245-261, pp. 307-321 and pp. 323-333.
3. René Lepelley , 'La côte des Vikings: toponymie des rivages du Val-de-Saire (Manche)', *Annales de Normandie*, March 1993, n° 1, pp. 17-39.
4. Jean Renaud, 'L'héritage maritime norrois en Normandie', *Mélanges René Lepelley*, Cahier des Annales de Normandie, n° 26, Caen, 1995, pp. 21-28.
5. Elisabeth Ridel, 'L'héritage maritime des Vikings en Normandie à la lumière des Iles britanniques et irlandaises: toponymie et vocabulaire des côtes', doctoral thesis under the supervision of

Professor René Lepelley, University of Caen.

6. Hjalmar Falk, *Altnordisches Seewesen*, Heidelberg, 1912, p. 102.
    R. Cleasby and G. Vigfusson., *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, sec.
    ed., Oxford, 1957, p. 574.
7. *Inventio et Miracula Sancti Vulfranni*, ed. Jean Laporte, Rouen,
    1938.
    Miracula sancti Vulfranni episcopi, AA. SS., March, III, p. 152.
8. A. Jal, *Glossaire nautique*, Paris, 1848, p. 1137.
9. 'L'*esnege* (variante *esnesche*) désigne selon Robert Wace le bateau
    du duc Guillaume II dans *Le Roman de Rou (1160-1170)*', ['The
    word *esnege* (variant *esnesche*) designate the ship of William II, the
    son of William the Conqueror according to Wace in *Le Roman de
    Rou* 1160-1170)'] ed. H.J. Holden, Paris, 1973, III, line 9849. Benoît
    (Benedict), in his *Chronicle of the Dukes of Normandy (1170)*, ed.
    Carin Fahlin, Lund, 1951, II, line 29335, uses the word *esneque* to
    refer to the boats of the English king Ethelred, who in the year
    1000 launched an expedition to the Cotentin.
10. Ambroise, *Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, ed. G. Paris, Paris, 1897,
    lines 1565-1567. Ambroise took part in the Third Crusade at
    Richard I's side. He must have taken notes while actually on
    campaign, which he then wrote up later. As G. Paris suggests 'c'est
    en somme le journal de l'expédition de Richard'. It is therefore a
    work of great value.
    Translation: 'During the night, without further delay, the king had
    all the horses disembark which were in the *eneques*.'
11. John Le Patourel, 'Le gouvernement de Henri II Plantagenêt et la
    mer de la Manche', *Recueil d'études offert au doyen Michel de
    Boüard, Annales de Normandie*, 1982, pp. 331-332.
12. C.H. Haskins, *Norman Institutions*, Cambridge, Harvard University
    Press, 1925, p. 121.
13. For the *esneca* of Richard I, see *Pipe Rolls, 2 Richard I*, p. 9, cited by
    John Le Patourel, p. 331.
14. *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. by Charles Plummer and
    John Earle, Oxford, 1892, vol. I, pp. 178-9 et p. 197.
15. In 1299 a ship was registered in England by the name of *Le Snack*,
    and in 1300 we find two ships of this name: 'Johani Kittey,
    magistro del snak de la Rye, Johanni Manekyn, magistro del snak
    Sancti Thom'; cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, sec. ed., Oxford,
    1989, vol. XV, p. 820.
16. In Old French the word *esneque* appears at the beginning of the
    13th century in the Verse Chronicle of Philippe Mousket, ed. F. de
    Reiffenberg, Bruxelles, 1838, II, lines 20947 et 20995. The word
    figures amongst other names of boats used at this period.
17. John Stewart mentions two places called Sneckerem in Shetland,
    one at Lunnasting, the other in Skerries, where there are the
    remains of a 'naust', *Shetland Place-Names*, Lerwick, 1987, p. 177.
18. Hugh Marwick, *Orkney Farm-Names*, Kirkwall, 1952, p. 58.
19. Jan Bill, 'Ships and Seamanship', in *The Oxford Illustrated History
    of the Vikings*, ed. by P. H. Sawyer, Oxford, 1997, p. 192.
20. Hjalmar Falk, *Altnordisches Seewesen* ..., p. 103.
21. Jean Renaud , 'L'héritage maritime norrois ...', p. 21.
22. *Recueil des Actes des ducs de Normandie (911-1066)*, ed. Marie

Fauroux, Caen, 1961, n° 61, p. 185.
23. Charles Joret , 'Les noms de lieu d'origine non romane et la
colonisation germanique et scandinave en Normandie', *Congrès du
Millénaire de la Normandie*, Rouen, 1912, p. 140. Since the writing
of this article, I found two other place-names recorded in the
present day : Figar designates a sea-rock on the shore of Calvados
in Lion-sur-Mer and Figard, another sea-rock near Agon-
Coutainville in La Manche; see E. Ridel, 'L'héritage des Vikings
dans le domaine de la pêche en Normandie (du XIe s. à nos jours)',
in *L'Héritage maritime des Vikings en Europe de l'Ouest
(Proceedings of the International Congress of Flottemanville-Hague,
30 sept./3 oct. 1999)*, ed. by E. Ridel, University Press of Caen
(forthcoming).
24. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. V, p. 968.
The Place-Names of Cumberland (English Place-Names Society vol.
XX), Cambridge, 1950, part. I, p. 79.
25. B.G. Charles, *Non Celtic Place-Names in Wales*, London, 1938, p.
46-47.
Note that Fishguard is called Abergwaun in Welsh.
26. Charles Joret, 'Les noms de lieu d'origine non romane ...', p. 121-
122, 137.
Jean Renaud, *Les Vikings et la Normandie*, Rennes, 1989, p. 165,
169.
27. René Lepelley, 'La côte des Vikings ...,'
28. W. F. H Nicolaisen, 'Early Scandinavian naming in the Western
and Northern Isles', *Northern Scotland*, 1978-80, pp. 107-108.
29. R. Lepelley, 'La côte des Vikings ...', p. 26.
30. Jakob Jakobsen, *The Place-Names of Shetland*, London, 1936, p. 35.
31. Rollon belonged to the family of Rǫgnvaldr, jarl of Möre in
Norway, whose descendants settled in Orkney. See Lucien Musset,
'L'origine de Rollon', *Nordica et Normannica*, pp. 383-387.
32. Gillian Fellows-Jensen, 'Les noms de lieux d'origine scandinave et
la colonisation viking en Normandie, examen critique de la
question', *Proxima Thulé*, Paris, 1994, vol. I, pp. 99-100.
33. For *grunnr* see Jakob Jakobsen , op. cit. note 28, p. 93. Loch
Gruinard, on the north-west coast of Scotland, comes from *grunna-
fjörðr*, 'shallow bay', cf . Ian Fraser, 'Norse settlement on the
north-west seaboard', *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain*,
ed. Barbara Crawford, Leicester University Press, 1995, p. 99.
For *kerlingr* in Orkney, see Hugh Marwick , *Orkney Farm-Names*,
p. 276; and for Ireland, see Magnus Oftedal, 'Scandinavian place-
names in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Seventh Viking Congress*,
Dublin, 1976, p. 132.
34. I am now editing the proceedings of the international congress
L'Héritage maritime des Vikings en Europe de l'Ouest organized
within this European programme (University Press of Caen).
Forthcoming for 2001.