From Kings to Dukes : Brittany Between the 5 th and the 12 th Century

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1.Introduction

Brittany owes it name to the Brythonic[1] immigrants who moved from insular Britain to north-western Gaul, then known as Armorica, between the 4th and the 7th centuries. The north and west of the Breton peninsula were colonised by these settlers from across the Channel, while the eastern part of modern Brittany, the area around Rennes and Nantes came under the control of the Franks. By the end of the 5th century, the latter had taken over control of the whole of ancient Gaul, apart from the tip of ancient Armorica where the Bretons resisted the Frankish kings' domination for some time.

Brittany even witnessed the emergence of a royal lineage recognised in due course by the Franks in 851, but the new Breton kingdom was soon weakened by the Viking raids and internal fighting. This weakening of the central Breton power in the 10th century effectively benefited the aristocracy which wielded power at a local level. In the 11th and 12th centuries, counts, viscounts and castellans would gain power under the relative authority of a prince: the Duke of Brittany. At that time, Brittany was a principality with little effective power for two centuries, until the prince's power was reinforced by the Plantagenets during the second half of the 12th century. Lying in the westernmost part of France, on the fringes of the Kingdom of the Franks, Brittany had a distinct and peculiar history, shaped by dual Brythonic and Frankish influences.[2]

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1 The term 'Brython' (Middle Welsh) is the original name of the "Bretons" and is used here to highlight the fact that the settlers arriving from Britain during this period spoken Brythonic (i.e P-Celtic/British Celtic), as opposed to Goidelic (Q-Celtic/ Gaelic). The name for the Breton language, *Brezhoneg*, is directly related to this ethnonym, the language of the Brythons. The distinction between the "Bretons" and "Britons" is an artificial one and appears only in English. In contemporary French, "Breton" refers equally to the British people as well as to the "Bretons" of north-western France. 'Bretagne' is the French term for 'Brittany'(Little Britain) and 'Grande-Bretagne' is 'Great Britain'. During the Middle Ages, the Latin term *Britannia* applied equally to both 'Brittany' and 'Britain'.

2 For works of reference dealing with the period, see Chédeville & Guillotel (1984); Chèdeville & Tonnerre (1987). For a recent study in English, see Cunliffe (2021).

2.1.From Armorica to Brittany

The Gaulish name for Brittany was Armorica meaning 'the country by the sea', situated between two major rivers, the Loire and the Seine. The Armorican population is mentioned by Julius Caesar in his *De Bello Gallico*.[3] After their conquest of the territory, the Romans retained the pre-existing organisation and the Breton peninsula was divided into five *civitates* corresponding to the original tribes who occupied the tip of the Armorican peninsula, namely the Osismii, the Curiosolitae, the Venetii, the Redones and the Namnetes. Towards the 4th and 5th centuries, the Gallo-Roman capitals of the last three of these territories adopted the name of the people living there: Vannes, Rennes and Nantes. These cities were then enclosed within fortified walls and after a time, came under the control of the counts appointed by the Frankish kings and of the bishops, under whose power the Christian communities that were developing at the time were placed.

From then on, the northern and western parts of the peninsula would experience waves of migration from neighbouring Britain, a territory formerly under Roman rule but now experiencing raids by the Angles and the Saxons but also the Scots.[4] Between the 4th and the 7th centuries, as the Roman empire fell, Christianised and 'Romanised' Britons fleeing these raids sought refuge on the coasts of Gaul, which could be reached in about a day's sailing. The lives of saints written after the event as well as a few contemporary or later texts whose authors lived outside the Armorican peninsula[5] give accounts of these migrations. Large numbers of Brythonic auxiliaries (*foederati*, 'mercenaries') served in the Roman army. One of their generals, Magnus Maximus (known as Macsen Wledig in Welsh tradition) was proclaimed Emperor of Rome by his troops and, from 383-388 fought in Gaul. These Brythononic troops contributed to the aims of such usurpers on several occasions and participated in the defence of Gaul before finally being left to fend for themselves.[6] According to Welsh tradition, such Brythonic troops were the first to settle Armorica.

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3 César, *De Bello Gallico*, VII, IV and LXXV, quoted Jean-Yves Eveillard (2013: 26–2), from a text edited and translated by L.-A. Constans (1972: II.v–viii).

4 The reference here is to the *Scot(t)i*, Gaelic-speaking raiders from Ireland who settled large areas of the Hebrides and north-western mainland of Britain. Their name was later given to all the inhabitants of the Scotland, formerly called *Calēdonia* 'Caledonia' by the Romans. They are known in Middle Welsh as the *Gwyddel-Ffichti*, 'the Irish-Picts'.

5 A now dated approach containing the publication of sources is Léon Fleuriot's *Les origines de la Bretagne. L'émigration*, Paris: Payot, 1982.

6 From the *Historia Brittonum* attributed to Nennius, written down after the period and later taken up by many authors (see Merdrignac 2003: 75–89).

Migrations to Brittany would intensify during the 6th century,[7] as displaced Brythonic populations took control of the old cities of the Osismii and the Curiosolitae from the Franks who now ruled over ancient Gaul. Progressing eastwards, these Brythonic settlements refused to pay tribute or service the Franks. According to some authors,[8] thousands of people were to mix with the native Celtic population. Even after a few centuries of Roman rule, the Gaulish language, closely related to Brythonic, was still spoken in the west of the Armorican peninsula. This facilitated the integration of the newcomers (orthodox Christian people, with trade links to the area dating back to protohistory). This was in no way an invasion, rather a gradual and probably peaceful settling of small communities who were a minority compared with the pre-existing Armorican population which may have exceeded 100,000 people.

The 6th century saw the emergence of 'little Brittany', characterised by the language and the existence of rural Christian communities known as '*plou*s' organised around chiefs and saints in the western part of the peninsula. The presence of these toponyms is what has made it possible to establish that the settlement of Bretons decreased gradually from the Léon area, in the North-West, to a limit extending in an arc from Savenay (to the west of Nantes) to the Mont Saint-Michel, with Roman enclaves subsisting nonetheless, namely in the presence of names ending in *–ac*.[9] The border between Breton-speaking and Gallo-speaking Brittany would later be marked by a line joining Saint-Brieuc to Vannes.

Gregory of Tours mentions conflictual relationships between the Franks and armed groups of *Britanni* led by chiefs in the second half of the 6th century:[10] he denounces the rule of a chief named Waroc over the old Gaulish territory of the Veneti and his taking advantage of the fact that the Frankish kings were busy fighting one another to ransack the Frankish counties of Nantes and Vannes.

For practical purposes, I shall henceforth refer to these Brythonic settlers of Brittany as "Bretons". The border with the Bretons was now materialised by the river Vilaine. On the basis of later sources, now being debated, there were three Breton 'kingdoms', ruled by charismatic, sometimes cruel, chiefs or kings like Conomor, reputed to have killed his young wives as soon as they became pregnant (Bourgès 1996: 419–27). It seems that the northern half of the peninsula constituted

7 An alternative chronology of Breton immigration which would have been limited to the elites coming from insular Domnonea *circa* 475–550 (see Brett 2014: 157–77).

8 Procopius of Caesarea and Gildas, whose texts relating to the *Britanni* have led to various interpretations (see Coumert 2007: 383–92).

9 Latouche (1996). Concerning the Breton border, see Chédeville & Guillotel (1984: 103–12).

10 Latouche (1996: I.V.xxvi.288, xxix.290, xxxi.292; id., II.IX.xviii.203–204, X.ix.272–273, xi.274). Gregory of Tours mentions the names of Chanao, Maclou, Conomer, Budic, Thierry, Jacob, Weroc and Vidimaclus.

a kingdom, that may have been called *Domnonea*.[11] In the years 630, a king named Judikael had diplomatic links with the Frankish king Dagobert, but what happened in Brittany for the century that followed is unknown as there are no records or sources of any kind (Wallace-Hadrill 1960: 65).

We therefore have to rely on texts written later, like the lives of saints that were written in the second half of the 9th century, or lists of individuals such as those concerning the kings and earls of Cornouaille, compiled in the cartularies of Cornouaille in the 11th and 12th centuries (La Borderie 1888: 172-3). One finds in them no less than three Gradlons, who served to create the story of the legendary King Gradlon/Gralon who ruled over the Kingdom of Ys.

In this same period, one finds mentions of leaders of the Breton clergy said to have founded the Breton bishoprics of Dol (Samson), Léon (Paul-Aurélien) and Alet (Malo), distinct from the old Gallo-Roman seats of Rennes, Nantes and Vannes. These are the great Breton saints who crossed the Channel and whose lives, imbued with legend and mystery, were described and enhanced or filled with mythical meaning in the following centuries (Poulin: 2009).

2.2. An indomitable warrior people at the fringes of the Carolingian empire (753–831)

In 751, Pepin the Short was crowned King of the Franks and succeeded in bringing back some unity in the kingdom. He took Vannes from the Bretons in 753 and appointed a count to contain the threat of Breton rebellion (Bouquet 1859: 336). With the same aim in mind, and wanting to see Christianity extended and unified, his son Charlemagne created the Breton march, a buffer zone comprised of the counties of Vannes, Nantes and Rennes, the care of which was entrusted to a *missi*, a Frankish aristocrat (it is thought the first *missi* may have been Rolland, who held the title of «*préfet de la marche de Bretagne*» in 778 (Eginhard 1923: 31).[12] He could rely on a police force with informers beyond the border where he could launch military actions with the assistance of the Frankish army, and important operations were conducted to force the Bretons into submission and incorporate Armorica into the Frankish Kingdom. The rebels were made to pay a tribute, provide weapons and hostages and swear allegiance to the Emperor, as happened in 799 (Kurze, 1890: 61). This was a never-ending process—indeed, the royal, and later imperial, forces were engaged on other fronts and this was an area that yielded only little booty, with a terrain which hindered the progress of the Frankish cavalry and the Bretons resorting to guerilla warfare in the face of the Franks' scorched earth strategy (Cassard 1986: 3–27).

11 This name appeared relatively late and could have been that of a kingdom on the island of Britain only (Coumert 2008: 15–42).

12 The allusion here is that he may be the historical figure associated with the Roland of the Chanson de Roland who fell at the Battle of Roncevault during this same year.

In 814, Breton chieftain Morvan defied the Emperor's envoys before being tracked down and killed by the Franks near Priziac. Guyomarc'h, another chieftain, also attempted to rebel around 824–825, but failed like Morvan (Faral 1964: 104–5, 122–5, 132–3, 154–5). The many military operations launched by the Franks for a period of nearly 80 years would only enable them to contain the raids of Breton marauders in the eastern part of the territory.

2.3. Emergence of a royal lineage: Nominoé, Erispoé and Solomon

In 831, Emperor Louis the Pious whose political power was waning chose to appoint as the 'Envoy of the Emperor and Chief in Brittany' a Breton aristocrat by the name of Nominoé who probably came from Poher.[13] Nominoé swore an oath of allegiance to the Emperor and pledged to preserve the peace in Brittany, from the territory he was in charge of and based in: the county of Vannes. To this end, he would have to bring all the Breton aristocrats under his authority and ensure the acculturation of Brittany, aligning it with the Carolingian civil and ecclesiastical models. It was Nominoé who was behind the first unification of Brittany thanks to several changes, namely the entrusting of the administration to the earls, the development of the use of the written word and growing prestige and influence of the monasteries, which followed the Benedictine precepts as in the other counties of the Frankish Empire. This was in effect the start of a political, religious and cultural alignment — an integration which the Emperor wanted, but which was nonetheless threatened by the divisions and wars that led to the splitting up of the Frankish Empire with the Treaty of Verdun, in 843, following the death of Louis the Pious.

It was during this period of instability that Nominoé chose to cast off the Frankish yoke and go to war against Charles the Bald, king of West Francia. The Breton chief launched an offensive and won several battles against the Frankish armies, namely at Ballon in 845. He then went on to seize Rennes and Nantes in 851. He died during a raid on Frankish lands, not long after this, and was succeeded by his son Erispoé who, that same year, won the battle of Jengland against the Frankish army, on the River Vilaine. Charles the Bald had to come to terms with his defeat by the Bretons. In 851, Brittany was officially born with the signing of the Treaty of Angers, and Erispoé was acknowledged as 'King of the Bretons' by the king of the Franks, who relinquished the counties of Nantes and Rennes (Deshaisnes 1871: 77–8). This marked the end of the Breton March and the birth of a unified Breton Kingdom, under Frankish power yet led by a native dynasty. Charles the Bald would also have his son betrothed to the daughter of Erispoé, with the eventual aim of of integrating the Breton Kingdom into the Frankish Empire.

13 For details of the status and functions of Nominoé, see Chédeville & Guillotel 1984: 227–34 and Cassard 2003.

In 857, however, Erispoé was assassinated by Salomon, his cousin, who swore loyalty to the King of the Franks and obtained further territories from the latter. While Solomon occasionally entered into alliances with bands of Viking raiders, he also offered his support to the King, during the siege of Angers, in 873. It was Solomon also who converted the see of Dol into an archbishopric. Although this sovereign would in turn be assassinated in a conspiracy led by Breton aristocrats, in 874, it was nevertheless under his reign that the Breton kingdom would expand the most, reaching the confines of the river Maine and the Cotentin, in Normandy.

As a result, after permanently integrating the areas of Rennes and Nantes in 851, Brittany was made up of two linguistic entities: to the west, there was a Breton-speaking Brittany, and to the east, one that spoke Gallo and where the Frankish influence was strongest. The centre of gravity had also moved east, with the doubling in size of the territory under Breton control. Brittany became bilingual and the Breton elites adopted the Carolingian model. The Breton chiefs took advantage of the internal divisions among the Carolingians to set up a peripheral kingdom, although they themselves remained divided by dynastic rivalries against a background of political assissinations. At the end of the 9th century, a third King of Brittany, Alan the Great, would come to power, not without some difficulty, and following internal opposition and attacks which he is said to have defeated at Questembert towards 890, his reign also came to an end, *circa* 908.

3. Breton society

Dozens of 'Breton' communities that settled in the land at some point between the 5th and 7th centuries have left their imprint on Breton toponymy. They founded the 220 or so *plou*s: parishes organised around a church and its village, *gwi*-in Breton. These communities were often associated with the name of a man who was identified as the eponymous founder, the 'saint' or the 'chief', who could be a member of the clergy or a layman. The *plou*s corresponded to a territory that was later delineated by geographical elements, such as rivers, roads or forests[14]. At that same period, the landscape was christianised through the setting up of hundreds of monolithic crosses, sometimes erected on top of Iron Age steles, while fountains or even chapels were built on the sites of former places of worship, like springs. Other toponyms bear witness to the Bretonnisation of the territory: *Lan*, for instance, which indicates the existence of a hermitage or monastery which sometimes became parishes in later times, like Landévennec or Landerneau. Toponys startin with *Tre-* used to describe hamlets or districts. Some of them occasionally became parish subdivisions, named *trèves*. The term *lez* or *lis* seems to have applied to a court—an aristocratic

14 See Tanguy 1981: 121–55. Some of the conclusions about the breton and ancient origins of the *plou*s have since been called into question (see Lunven 2014: 101–116.)

residence. The Breton language — Old Breton — is mainly known through surviving words, hundreds of glosses or notes appearing in the texts essentially written in Latin. Thousands of placenames or names of individuals can be found in such documents, mainly in charters (Tanguy 1998: 49–69). The educated members of society in the west of the peninsula were bilingual, speaking Breton yet writing exclusively in Latin.

Breton society was organised along a clan pattern, with a *machtiern*, a chief who acted as guardian and ruler of a parish chiefdom, as in Cornwall and Wales across the Channel (Sheringham 1981: 61–72). This clan chief would take on the role of notary and judge; and was in all likelihood an important landowner enriched through hereditary succession, who had prestige and wealth and lived in an *aula*, a dwelling for the elite known under the term of *lis-* or *lez-*, which was characterised by its size and the fact that it was both ostentatious and defensive, surrounded as it was with ditches and dykes. These Gaulish chiefdoms were probably ruled or federated at a higher level by a man of power, sometimes referred to as king by the Bretons or count by the Franks. While some men who worked the land were free, others would have had servile status.

What few official documents remain from the reigns of Erispoë and Salomon show that in the absence of a royal chancel, the acts edicted by the sovereign were often transcribed by and in the monasteries, which received donations from the sovereign. The court of the Breton kings was itinerant: it would take up residence in several places, the names of which have sometimes been recorded (Guigon 1997). Important decisions were given a seal of approval by men of power during yearly assemblies or councils: their names sometimes appear at the bottom of acts. Envoys of the Frankish kings would likely have been made to feel the power of the Breton kings by being received in palaces, and the distribution of presents was designed first and foremost to reflect the wealth — and power — of those who gave them. The main beneficiaries of such presents were the monasteries, like that of Redon which was founded in 832. The names of several counts which appear in the 9th and 10th century show that the Breton sovereigns had adopted the mode of government of the Franks, and the mention of *machtierns* would gradually disappear.

Similar acculturation was taking place in the religious field: in 818 already, during his campaign against Morvan, the Emperor summoned the Abbot of Landévennec and ordered him to adopt the rule of Saint Benedict. The practice originally introduced by the Irish and based on numerous periods of fasting, prayer vigils and penance was losing ground. The oldest acts of the cartulary of Redon which date from the 9th century also show that the Carolingian model was becoming the norm in the drafting of diplomas which were later inserted into the cartulary

of this abbey.[15] The network of bishoprics was completed and towards the end of the 10th century, it comprised nine dioceses. Besides the three bishoprics of Gallo-Roman origin which existed as early as the 5th century (Nantes, Rennes and Vannes), others were founded, allegedly by saints of Breton origin for whom *vitae* were written. In them one reads about hermits or abbots, who having retired from the world, had to take on episcopal responsibilities at the end of their life at the imperial request of an influential and powerful figure, as in Dol, Saint-Pol-de-Léon and Alet. The great monasteries like Landévennec, Redon, Saint-Méen and Léhon were cultural centres whose prestige and influence reached out across the land. Some two dozen Breton manuscripts from the 9th and 10th centuries survive, which bear witness to the considerable activity of their *scriptoria* but also to part Brittany played in the Carolingian renaissance, with texts of the gospel, liturgical manuscripts, text in classical Latin and around a dozen *vitae*. There is however no trace of any Breton chronicle apart from the Chronicle of Nantes which was pieced together and is not the original text (see Merlet).

The use of the Breton language is attested in hundreds of glosses written in Old Breton, literal translations of Latin words inserted between the lines or in the margins of manuscripts written in Latin, several thousand names and a few dozen short sentences. With some 300 charters preserved (Chèdeville 1998: 27–47), the evidence provided by the cartulary of Redoncompiled in the 12th century is central to understanding the Breton world of the 9th and early 10th centuries. Art historians have also demonstrated that Brittany played a part in the Carolingian renaissance, with monuments like Saint-Philibert-de-Grand-Lieu or the abbey of Landévennec (Gallet 2015: 61–78).

4. Norman raids and settlements

The men of the North otherwise known as the Vikings struck areas south of Brittany, in Noirmoutiers, in 799, but it took nearly fifty more years before they eventually launched a surprise raid, in 843, on Nantes where they massacred the bishop and part of the population (Merlet 1896: 15–17). From 850, they settled on islands in the Loire estuary to make their plundering raids more practical and terrorise the local population. They are believed to have laid waste to many locations along the coast, in particular monasteries – many of disappeared forever. The Breton chiefs fought against them but were repeatedly defeated, like Nominoé or Solomon. They either paid the Normans a tribute or chose to side with them against the Franks, which is how the Franks were defeated at Brissarthe, in 866 (Cassard 1996). Such alliances

15 For further reference, see Decourson A., 1863, *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Redon en Bretagne*, Paris: Imprimerie Impériale as well as Guillotel, H., Chèdeville A. & Tanguy, B., *Cartulaire de l'abbaye Saint-Sauveur de Redon.*

were short-lived. Twelve years later, the Vikings took advantage of the assassination of Solomon, in 874 and of the ensuing succession disputes between the Breton chiefs which lingered for over a dozen years. Alan the Great earned this epithet after winning a great victory over the Vikings at Questembert, in 890, which ushered in a period of precarious peace until his death around 908. The early 10th century saw the Viking attacks resume with renewed ferocity, namely with the destruction of the Landévennec sanctuary in 913. In a process similar to what took place in Normandy in the Seine estuary, around Rouen, the Vikings set up durably in the Nantes area, which enabled them to control the Loire river, and founded a principality there (Tonnerre 1994: 273–81).

The relentless Vikings attacks caused an exodus of the Breton elites in the years following 920: the monks deserted their monasteries and fled with their relics and manuscripts (the community at Landévennec, for instance, would take refuge at Montreuil) before the monasteries were ransacked and destroyed (Guillotel 1982: 269–315). Aristocrats also fled into exile, among them was Mathuédoï, count of Poher and the son-in-law of Alan the Great, who sought refuge at the court of Anglo-Saxon king Aethelstan of Wessex, while the common people, for their part, were left to fend for themselves; attempts to rebel, like the revolt led by Mathuédoï who had come back from exile to free Cornouaille in 931, ended in failure.

In 936, Alan II (known as Alan Barbetorte, meaning 'Wrybeard'), the son of Mathuédoï and grandson of Alan the Great, negotiated his return with the Duke of Normandy and expelled the last Viking contingents out of Brittany, through the use of either force or diplomacy[16]. There would still be sporadic Viking raids until the early 11th century, as in Dol in 1014, but they would no longer represent such a major threat.

Not much is known about the precise extent of the destruction caused by the Vikings, which may have been exaggerated by the monks who were the main victims of their attacks. Their manuscripts and relics were disseminated and often lost, and it would take decades to rebuild. The cultural dynamics were broken; the production of the *scriptoria* had ceased to exist. After having spent time in the Rennes and Nantes areas, the lay Breton elites fled and took up residence, sometimes for a whole generation, in Frankish territory. There, the link with the Breton language was severed, Breton usages and customs were abandoned for those of the Frankish aristocracy.

Although Alan the Great and Alan Barbetorte settled in Nantes, neither the royal Breton title nor Breton unity were reinstated: Alan Barbetorte may have held

16 Regarding the account of a military reconquest put forward by the Chronicle of Saint-Brieuc, Hubert Guillotel has demonstrated that this return of the Breton chiefs was the result of negotiations(see Chèdeville & Guillotel 1984: 398–400).

the title of Count of Cornouaille and Count of Nantes, but the county of Rennes was in the hands of another count — Juhel Bérenger. The regions of the north-west of Brittany were not in their control, and the political centre of gravity of Brittany had shifted eastwards, with two new cities acting as capitals, Nantes and Rennes, competing against one another. In the second half of the 10th century, fierce battles for the *ducatus* would oppose the ducal houses of Nantes and Rennes.

5.1 Feudal Brittany: counts, viscounts and lords

Alan Barbetorte eventually gave up his claim to the royal title and only used that of Duke, and when he died in 952, his heirs were either eliminated or ousted. The countal house of Rennes eventually got the upper hand over that of Nantes by the end of the 10th century, thereby gaining power over the counties of Rennes, Nantes and Vannes.

In the middle of the next century, a new branch would emerge: that of the Counts of Brittany (Morin 2010), established at Lamballe and Guingamp but without any power over the Cornouaille, Porhoët and Léon areas. The Breton principality was under the influence of its neighbours, notably the Count of Anjou and the Duke of Normandy, whom the Counts of Rennes and Nantes had called upon for help in the dispute that opposed them. Territories like the area of the Mont-Saint-Michel, east of the River Couesnon, were lost.

In the years following 1060, Conan II, Count of Rennes, was attacked by William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, and died during a war with the Counts of Anjou. At the same time through clever matrimonial alliances, the Counts of Cornouaille would successively become Counts of Nantes in 1054, then of Rennes in 1066. Hoël, the first Duke of the House of Cornouaille, now controlled Vannes, Nantes and Rennes. Despite the contracting of marriages with French, Norman and Angevin lineages, the princes were not seen at the court of the French kings.

In search of adventure and lands, Breton knights took part in the conquest of England in 1066 and were granted fiefdoms after paying hommage to William the Conqueror. Conflicts between the dukes and their vassals could be fierce; with vassals having to pay hommage and the investiture of the fief, the feudal system was slowly taking root. Many aristocrats took advantage of the fact that the power of the prince was weakened and, to defy him, erected castles. This was a period of innumerable feuds and both the dukes and the Church struggled to pacify the *milites*.

5.2. A fragmented duchy: viscounts, castles and castellans circa the year 1000

It seems the great feudal families who owned most of the land, church property and royal rights were often descended from aristocratic lineages of the Carolingian period. In 1030–1050, lineages of viscounts, who were originally auxiliaries of the counts, founded independent *castellenia* by settling on princely or ecclesiastical

estates, as in Donges, or in the Léon and the Porhoët areas (Yeurc'h, Bourgès & Kernévez 2010).[17] They sometimes contested the authority of the dukes. There were occasional rebellions and it was not an easy task for the dukes to subdue them. From the end of the 11th century, several dozen castellan lineages are also recorded: these were sometimes former castle guardians who had become emancipated and had simply adopted the name of the fortress in their care, or had even given their own name to the said fortress, as was the case for Châteaubriant or La Roche-Bernard.

These powerful lines of castle-owners could sometimes mobilise dozens of knights, whom they used as pawns by giving them lands onto which the latter would build fortified mounds, such as those that surround the castles of Vitré and Fougères (Brand'honneur 2001). The most powerful of these exercised their right to banish, which was devolved to the duke, and on a lesser level, estate owners would take up arms and impose their vision of justice. Names recorded occasionally reveal that some of these men of power were descended from the old *machtierns*.

The rich and powerful would have fortresses erected and become castellans. Sometimes they might encourage the population to settle at the foot of their fortress by creating markets and fairs, and ensure the support of prestigious monasteries located in Brittany or the Loire area by making them gifts of lands, churches, rights and even men in the hope that this would help the foundation of a priory, entrusted to the care of one or two monks. This is how a second urban networkof sorts emerged, made up of all these dozens of towns clustered around castles.

From the 12th century, the old wood-and-mud castles would soon be replaced by stone ones, as in Guingamp (see Beuchet & Martineau 2001: 34–36). Hundreds of feudal mounds (earthen hillocks on top of which wooden or stone towers were erected) were also built, by powerful lords sometimes, but more often by lines of knights; such mounds or *mottes* served both as fortresses and dwellings and were ostentatious symbols of their owners' power (Brand'honneur 1990; Hingant 1994; Kernévez 1997). As would later be the case with manors, the vast number of feudal mounds recorded clearly shows that there was a proliferation of noble lineages in this period.

The Breton Church was organised into nine bishoprics. Those of Tréguier and Saint-Brieuc were the latest to be founded and became active towards the end of the 10th century. The Dukes failed to make Dol the metropolitan bishopric which the 9th century Breton sovereign had hoped it would become. In the 11th century, the sees were taken over by powerful dynasties, as in Quimper for instance, where, in the first half of the 11th century (Quaghebeur 2001: 130–4), the eldest son of the count and bishop of Cornouaille became the count, and his younger brother, the bishop.

17 For further reference, see the bibliography compiled by Hubert Guillotel who studied the origins of many lineages of lords and viscounts in Guaghebeur J. and Soleil S. (eds), 2010, *Le pouvoir et la foi au Moyen Âge en Bretagne et dans l'Europe de l'ouest. Mélanges en mémoire du professeur Hubert Guillotel*, Rennes: PUR. p. 735–738.

Before the Gregorian reform which started in the middle of the century, Nicolaism and Simonianism were common: priests would marry and charge money to give sacraments. Many churches fell into the hands of laymen, who were also paid their revenues. In addition to the ancient abbeys that were rebuilt, like those of Landévennec and Redon, new abbeys were founded: that of Saint-Georges de Rennes was founded by Duke Alan III around 1032, the abbey of Quimperlé, by Alain Canhiart, Count of Cornouaille, around 1050, and several decades later, a viscount of Léon founded the abbey of Saint-Mathieu. In all, seventeen Benedictine abbeys were founded or restored in the 11th century and the following century would see the building of just under a dozen more (Chèdeville & Tonnerre 1984: 224–25, 234–35; Dufief 1998: 165–70). Counts, viscounts and lords appealed to the abbeys of the Loire like Marmoutier in order to set up dozens of priories which bolstered the religious education of the population (Pichot 2006: 9–32). New Romanesque churches meanwhile would enable the authorities to gather population on Sundays and during the innumerable religious feasts.

There are very few documents concerning the peasantry, which most of the population belonged to: one finds a few scarce mentions of this category in charters but chroniclers only showed an interest in important figures. Archaeology occasionally helps to fill in the blanks. Digs investigating deserted villages located on poor lands (abandoned precisely for this reason after the 14th-century plague epidemic) have sometimes contributed to giving a somewhat sordid vision of a peasantry having to share their living quarters with their animals (Tonnerre 2008). More than 14.000 recorded *ker-* toponyms that can date back to the 11th and 12th centuries, attest to the increasing density of human settlement during this period. Today still, dispersed habitats, composed of isolated houses and little hamlets organised around a chapel or parish church, is characteristic of Brittany. These are known as *villages éclatés* ('scattered villages', see Pichot 2002) whose inhabitants essentially meet to attend religious services.

5.3. The rising power of the Dukes of Brittany

In 1066, the counts of Cornouaille claimed the ducal title after having gained control of the counties of Cornouaille, Vannes, Nantes and Rennes through marriages. They would progressively reinforce their power by subduing or eliminating some of their rivals, although they did not succeed in becoming as powerful as their neighbours, the Dukes of Normandy and the Counts of Anjou (Guillotel 2014). In 1154, a battle for power led young Duke Conan IV to request the support of the English King, Henry II Plantagenet, who was also Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou and Aquitaine. Henry II was the most powerful prince in the West: having essentially ruled over an empire, he had his eye on Brittany (Everard 2000). In 1166, he forced Conan IV to abdicate and obliged the latter's daughter, Constance, to marry

one of Henry's sons, Geoffrey II. As the both Constance and Geoffrey were underage, Henry II's plan was to govern Brittany by himself, but the great feudal lords, fearing they would loose their prerogatives, rebelled, first in 1167, and again in 1181. Their castles were destroyed, their lands laid waste and they had to hand over hostages to the sovereign. A number of them placed themselves in the service of their new master.

Duke Geoffrey only reigned a few years before dying prematurely in 1186. All hopes of the Bretons now resided in his son, Arthur, born after Geoffrey's death, but he was assassinated by his uncle, John Lackland (Jean sans Terre), in 1203. The Capetian sovereigns waited two long centuries for this moment and their descendent, King Philip Augustus of France, conquered Normandy and Anjou in 1204–1205, and now sought to extend his power over Brittany. The king married Alix, Arthur's half-sister and potential heir of the Duchy, to Peter of Dreux, a Capetian prince who was the first Duke of Brittany from the House of Dreux lineage.

The Plantagenets, however, did not only use force and brutality in their reign over Brittany: they also enacted new laws which were implemented throughout the whole of the Duchy, appointing seneshals (officers who combined military, judiciary, administrative and financial duties) and initiated a transition and the modernisation of the ducal system, which would be furthered by the Dukes of Brittany during the 13th century.

Conclusion

The Armorican peninsula developed specific traits during the migrations that occurred between the 4th–7th centuries and, from then on, came to be known as Brittany. The western part of the territory managed to resist Frankish influence and dominance until the mid-8th century, when the Frankish sovereigns attempted to subdue its untamed and marauding peripheral population through the use of force. However the failure of their military expeditions, compounded with the political difficulties with which the Franksih kings were faced, led them to entrust the power to a single native prince, Nominoé, whose successors (Erispoë and Solomon) obtained the royal title. Hence, a Breton royalty born on the battlefields near the River Vilaine extended eastwards, but because of the Breton political divisions and Viking invasions, their rule was short-lived, lasting only half a century before the royal title was lost. From this time onward, Brittany was ruled by Dukes.

From the middle of the 10th century, the Duke of Brittany found it impossible to impose his authority over the five *civitates* of the Armorican peninsula. By and large, he did manage to preserve the borders of the duchy from his Norman, Angevin and Poitevin neighbours. Although the Dukes of Brittany admittedly did not have the aura of Foulques Nerra or William the Conqueror, despite the loss of their royal title and its replacement by a ducal structure, what mattered most was

therefore preserved. After the Plantagenets failed to impose their rule over Breton territory in the middle of the 12th century, it was a French lineage descended from Peter of Dreux that fulfilled the task of creating the institutions of the Breton principality, which would reach the height of its power in the 15th century.

University of Western Brittany

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