

NAUTICAL TOPONYMY AND FIELDWORK IN LÉON, NORTH-WEST BRITTANY¹

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*Dedicated to Per Pondaven (1962–2008)
and all the Arvoriz² who so patiently answered our questions*

Introduction

Professor German insisted that I present this paper about a branch of linguistics the importance of which has long been recognised, namely, nautical toponymy, the study of place names in the maritime domain.

I shall outline the history of toponymy as a science in Brittany and explain the urgent need to collect orally-transmitted toponyms in the maritime areas. I shall then describe the approach adopted by a team of researchers to which I belong, which is dedicated to the massive collection of toponyms from the older Breton-speaking inhabitants of Léon, north-western Brittany.³ Finally, I shall propose some examples of how the collected data can be exploited, for both ethnographic and linguistic purposes.

1. Toponymy

In his thirst for knowledge, man has long been interested in the origin of place names, more or less seriously, but always sincerely. Specialists generally agree that the father of toponymy, as a scientific discipline, was Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, whose *Recherches sur l'origine de la propriété foncière et des noms de lieux habités en France* was published in 1880. Subsequently, researchers such as Auguste Lognon,

1. This article has been written for the benefit of non-French- and non-Breton-speaking scholars and was inspired by a lecture given by the author in Concarneau (Finistère, France) in October 2014. The latter was published in 2015 in the collection *Retours de mer* under the title of 'La toponymie nautique, un chenal vers la mémoire des populations littorales' ('Nautical toponymy: a channel towards the memory of coastal populations'). <https://www.locus-solus.fr/product-page/retour-de-mer-m%C3%A9moires-maritimes-en-chantier>. A complete and richly illustrated version can be found on the website *Histoire Maritime Bretagne Nord* by Pierre-Yves Decosse: <https://www.histoiremaritimebretagnenord.fr/app/download/13566623327/La+toponymie+nautique.pdf?t=1581688467>. My special thanks are to my dear daughters, Pauline & Audrey, for their help with the English translation of the original French contribution. They have also translated the original passages from French to English cited throughout the article.

2. Inhabitants of the *Arvor*, a thin coastal area wedged between the sea and the Breton hinterland.

3. The north-western part of Brittany, which schematically corresponds to northern Finistère.

Auguste Vincent, Albert Dauzat, Charles Rostaing and Ernest Nègre were inspired to study the toponymy of France. In order to discover the origins of the place names in which they were interested, they developed an efficient method: searching for the oldest forms of the names in question. Naturally, the older the attested form, the more likely it was to resemble the original form. Names collected in cartularies usually bring us back before the year 1000 AD. However, one should remain vigilant regarding certain Latin forms transcribed by occasionally mischievous monks. One can cite the example of Bonneuil, noted as *Bonus Oculus* in the 13th century (Morvan 2004: 9), or Paimpont, noted as *Panis Pontis* in 1207 (Vallérie 1995: 130).

But even if great care is taken, this approach can be hardly applied to place names in the maritime domain. The first serious nautical charts, that is, the only ones likely to provide a corpus of nautical toponyms, did not appear until the end of the 16th century. In the eyes of linguists, these forms are not old enough to allow the drawing of significant etymological lessons.

It is unfortunate that the equivalent of the Napoleon cadastre (*Cadastre napoléonien*)⁴ was not established for the maritime zone. One can only imagine the scope of this gigantic undertaking, which began during the reign of Napoleon and ended a few decades later, and which provides a detailed plan of the plots of land for each commune in France accompanied by the imposing ‘state of sections’ (*Etat des sections*), where the name of each parcel of land is generally recorded in the vernacular language. The motivations for this enormously ambitious project were of course legal and above all fiscal. The State was investing in the future. These administrative considerations make it easier to understand why nothing similar exists in the French maritime regions.

Toponymists wishing to do research into maritime areas must therefore abandon the idea of searching for old forms and turn to more recent sources. There are mainly two that are worthy of interest.

The first is the collection of maps surveyed from 1816–38 by the hydrographic engineer Charles-François Beautemps-Beaupré following a 1/145,000 scale offering relatively few toponymic results. Those nautical charts were originally designed to provide mariners with reliable documents that would guarantee navigational safety and thus avoid any potential dangers. It is also clear that the cartographers who carried out the field surveys did not master the Breton language. There are many more misspellings than in the *Cadastre*, where the land surveyors were inevitably assisted by municipal and parish officials. The latter were generally very much aware of the correct spelling and grammar of their own language.

4. A detailed cadastral map of over one hundred million land parcels throughout France instituted by Napoleon I in 1812.

On the other hand, a different source was commissioned and produced by the French Army. The maps made by the Royal geographical engineers are in fact older than those of Beautemps-Beaupré and bring us back a few years before the French Revolution (between 1776–83). They showcased many original names, bearing clear evidence of careful field investigations, breaking with an old tradition of compiling previous publications. Former cartographers had the unfortunate habit of copying one another, sometimes amplifying the errors of their predecessors in the process. The toponymy presented by the King of France’s geographic engineers is dense on the foreshore and in the immediate vicinity of estuaries, which are important areas militarily. Naturally, the dearth of data increases the further one goes out to sea.

These are therefore about the oldest written sources available to the researcher in Breton nautical toponymy.

1.1 A toponymy of nautical charts to be reviewed

Research in French toponymy was in full swing after World War I. Researchers found an almost virgin domain in which they could test their theories. This development accompanied the expansion of linguistics and particularly the field of dialectology. It was in 1937 that Albert Dauzat, director of studies at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, introduced a course in *toponymy and dialectology*. After the war, toponymy researchers continued their investigations and communicated the results of their work in journals such as *Onomastica* (1947–8), and later *La revue internationale d’onomastique* (1949–77).

It is in this context of intellectual effervescence linked to the study of maritime place names that a major undertaking was launched regarding the toponymy of nautical charts in western Brittany (Gendron 2008: 23–4). This was thanks to Admiral Henri Dyèvre, a Breton-speaking native of Poullaouen, and author of a short grammar of the local Breton. This experienced seaman, who was in charge of the Harbour Pilot School from 1936–7, took over the Central Hydrographic Service in August 1944 and continued to show interest in nautical charts and in particular in the Breton names, which were, by his own admission, poorly reported. Henri Dyèvre, who became a first-class General Hydrographic Engineer in 1948, notes that “Breton names, misunderstood by hydrographers and phonetically transcribed in ways that are barely imaginable, have literally been massacred and are in many cases hardly recognizable” (Dyèvre 1950: 91). Therefore, that same year, he decided to launch a complete revision of the toponymy of the coasts of western Brittany. His team included linguists and renowned scholars who could go out into the field to carry out their investigations and to meet local speakers and note down the names used locally in Breton for the places already identified on the nautical charts of the area to be surveyed.

From 1949–71, the results of these ambitious surveys were published in the *Annals of Hydrography*. A total of 9,329 names were compiled and presented in 19 publications, creating a fine corpus for Breton linguists and toponymists to study.

1.2 A new approach to nautical toponymy

Admiral Dyèvre's approach, although daring and innovative in many ways, was criticised by the Breton linguist Roparz Hémon. In particular, he highlighted the absence of phonetic transcriptions for the names collected, as well as the limited number of informants.

A few years later, in 1986, it was another Breton linguist, Mikael Madeg, who focused his attention on nautical toponymy and its scientific method. Preparing an ethnographic novel about the seaweed-collecting boats of Landéda and Saint-Pabu present on the island of Bannec (south of Ouessant), he carried out some toponymic surveys to situate his story. It is there that he discovered a real treasure — toponyms stored in the memories of the old people living along the coast, never recorded in writing and totally absent from the study of Joseph Cuillandre, who was, in 1949, the first to present the work commissioned by the Hydrographic Service.

Mikael Madeg, who graduated from the prestigious *Ecole normale supérieure*, had already got some experience of fieldwork. He had written a thesis on the nicknames of Léon, which led him to build up a network of informants throughout northern Finistère (i.e. Léon, Map 1). Before starting his work to collect toponyms, he had formulated a number of methodological principles. In particular, unlike his predecessors, he freed himself from the trap of etymology. In his view, during the first stage, the researcher should first collect names never recorded in writing, note them down in phonetic script, identify their location as well as possible, propose the variants that can be heard and attach a commentary for each name when necessary (names that are linguistically intriguing, popular legends linked to a given site, traditional activities associated with the place, etc.). Etymological research should be carried out at a later stage, once the toponymic corpus has been established.

During his investigations in the field, Mikael Madeg met two young researchers in the early months of 1988, Per Pondaven and myself. Both of us had already started oral investigations with the aim of making a nautical map of our area (Argenton for Per, Lampaul-Plouarzel for myself; cf. Map 2). Mikael Madeg had no trouble convincing us of the merits of his approach and invited us to support him in the task he had set for himself: the collection of all the place names, whatever they were, along the Léon coast. The project was a little crazy and, perhaps, overly ambitious. In order to accomplish the task, it was necessary to cover the entire coast from Landerneau to Morlaix without forgetting the islands of Batz, Ouessant and the Molène archipelago. The realisation and publication of this work would take us several years. The first volume came out in 1991 and the last ones in 2004, which,

in the case of Pondaven,⁵ was actually the result of 19 years of diligent fieldwork. In the end, 14 volumes, published by *Ar Skol Vrezoneg*, present about 20,000 names collected orally on the Léon coast from 913 informants. Indeed, it is very possible that this stretch of Breton coastline has been the object of the most comprehensive collection of nautical toponyms ever conducted in the world to date.



Map 1. The coastline of Finistère, western Brittany

5. “In particular, he (*i.e.* Madeg, M - Y. R.) took part in the whole enterprise of collecting the place name heritage along the Léon coast. In the end, he was the main craftsman of this endeavour having done all the formatting work” (Kêredol 2010: 221).

This work, resulting from an innovative methodological approach, was carried out within the framework of the *Ecole onomastique Léonarde* (henceforth, EOL), according to the name chosen by Mikael Madeg. The Madeg-Pondaven-Riou trio investigated other branches of onomastics as well. In the same spirit of massive collections from Breton speakers, they published results of fieldwork relating to surnames (Madeg et al. 2009) and first names (Madeg et al. 2006).

The approach taken by the EOL researchers was particularly time-consuming. It was necessary to be patient in order to be able to exploit a large corpus of data that yielded relevant conclusions. An alternative method among some onomasticians ignores the pronunciation of the place names and is only dedicated to etymology and historical linguistic reconstruction, but this view runs contrary to the EOL approach.

In many cases, however, a knowledge of the local pronunciation makes it possible to choose between two hypotheses. Bernard Tanguy instigated the study of both the old forms of place names as well as their pronunciation by local people. For instance, regarding a locality in Finistère, he wrote: “a village in Plouider (Finistère) is written *Tonanéac’h* by the *Nomenclature*, but *Toranéac’h* in the *Cadastré*. Which form does one choose? Knowing the pronunciation would probably solve the dilemma” (Tanguy 1975: 34). In the same vein, Gwennolé Le Menn (1993: 123), wrote the following about the surname Guichou: “The surnames Guichous and Guichoux are different and of uncertain etymology if the final ‘s’ is pronounced.”

These examples demonstrate that oral forms provide a mine of information crucial for onomastic research.

An example from our own collection will certainly help to better understand the EOL approach. In Lampaul-Plouarzel, a place name *Pors-Cave* was recorded at the time of our investigation. Some researchers saw this as a sign of the existence of a shipowners’ cellar in a place formerly dedicated to coastal shipping. Others, relying on the *Porscav* form exhibited on the IGN map, preferred to see a *Porzh Skav*, which could be rendered as the ‘Port of the Elderberry’. There are indeed elderberry bushes on the site. The oral forms found locally do not shed any light on the matter. One can indeed hear *Poskaf*, or even *Pouskaf*. The name, which is well known, is obviously a reduced form. This phonetic erosion must be less prevalent in communities that know the name but rarely use it. In 2003, on Molène Island, off the coast of Lampaul, we collected another form of this name as *Porz ar Skaf*. This led us to find out about the term *skaf*, probably to be interpreted as cabotage *escaffé*,⁶ originally an Old French term for the rowing boat. What is interesting in this example

6. This is the most common spelling of the word found in the French acts of the Atlantic coast and is commonly accepted by researchers working on Western European maritime history towards the end of the Middle Ages. The oldest attested, *escaffé*, dates to 1288 (Greimas 2007 s.v.).

is that the name of the port corresponds to the name of the nearest hamlet. Written forms exist, and allow us to go back in time: *Porscave* (1906), *Porscaff* (1880), *Porsascaff* (1862), *Porsarscaf* (1836), *Porzascaf* (1762), *Pors ar Scaff* (1756) and *Portz an Scaff* (1716). The form collected in Molène thus takes us back at least 250 years!

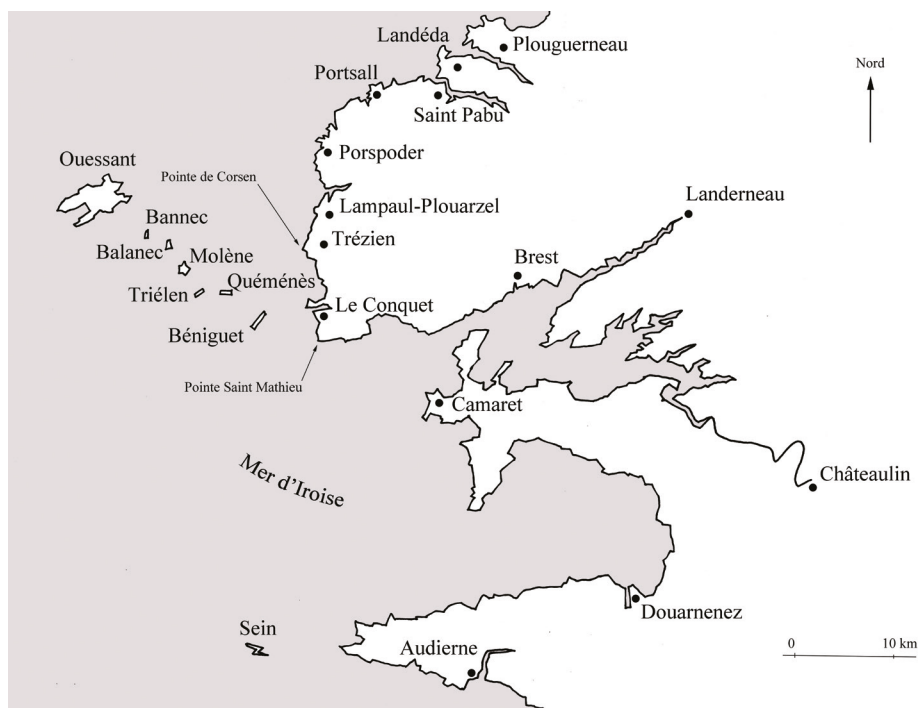
The importance of the oral forms is therefore not to be underestimated, let alone ignored. Unlike written forms, they only exist in the memories of older people in or from Brittany. The urgency of collecting them is important, especially in such coastal locations where the oldest forms have never been recorded.

2. Surveys in the maritime environment

It is well understood that the surveys, carried out on a theme that might be viewed at first glance as uninviting, open a door to the collective memory of the coastal populations. Our approach, which requires a large number of informants, has enabled us to meet many of the actors/witnesses of coastal activities and events. Each one is convinced that he or she knows a small section of the foreshore perfectly well and *de facto* recognises the importance of his or her testimony in the context of our investigations. That way, the collector can quickly build up a dense network of informants on a neutral subject that does not suggest any negative value judgement about the community or any other attitude that might portray the social group being investigated in a damaging light. It is therefore an exceptional opportunity to contact, for example, seamen (former seaweed gatherers for the most part) who are not spontaneously identified when one begins looking for informants at the start of an ethnographic project. Refusals to give an interview are very rare. Quickly, one creates a privileged network, after determining the skills of each person and their enthusiasm to conjure up memories of the past. An interview ending with “Feel free to come back any time” is a sign of fruitful future exchanges, the informant being in a frame of mind to offer more feedback about a bygone era. The collector must take advantage of the first opportunity to visit to obtain any information that he might have neglected or misunderstood during preceding conversations.

As well as acquiring detailed maps of the area under study, the researcher must be well aware of the activities practised locally beforehand and s/he should not hesitate to ask the informants for precise explanations if any doubts remain. For a very simple activity such as coastal fishing, for example, it may come as a surprise to learn that the crevice in the rocks where a conger eel or a lobster hides may have a name of its own! The usual Breton term all along the Léonard coast for such a crevice or hole is *keo* (cf. Giraudon & Riou 2013: 26–8). Very often, such holes are only known to a few coastal fishermen who keep their locations a secret, just like mushroom pickers who never reveal the places where ‘their mushrooms’ can be found. For that reason, it is almost surprising that they can have a name. They are often associated with the name or nickname of their ‘discoverer’:

Keo Lerm ('Guillaume's *keo*', Trielen), *Keo Chouan* ('the *keo* of Chouan', Cléder), *Keo ar Beig* ('the *keo* of little Hervé', Island of Batz). They can be located in the fisherman's area, *Keo en he Gevred* ('the *keo* of the south-east wind', Plouarzel), *Keo Gwalarn Vian* ('the *keo* of the little north-west wind', Plouguerneau). They can be associated with a well-known nautical name, such as *Keo Pil ar Vartoloded* ('the *keo* of the seamen's rock', Kerlouan), or more simply specified by the name of the species that is supposed to live there, *Keo al Legestr* ('the lobster *keo*'), *Keo ar Zilienn Goz* ('the big conger's *keo*'). Finally, they can be specified by a qualifying adjective, *ar C'heo Kamm* ('the twisted *keo*'), *ar C'heo Munud* ('the tiny *keo*'), *ar C'heo Plad* ('the flat *keo*'). Nor should we forget *ar C'heo Braz* ('the big *keo*') or *ar C'heo Bian* ('the small *keo*')... One hundred and thirteen *keo*-names were recorded during our investigations. As these names generally belong to the intimate family sphere, or at best to the local community, one can obviously suppose that only a small fraction of the total was collected.



Map 2. Western Finistère and the north-western Léon coastline (i.e. northern Finistère)

Names of headlands, creeks and rocks, on the other hand, are generally easier to obtain, as long as they are not associated with a person's name or the nickname of a person who is known to the informant. For example, an old fisherman and former crewman on a gabbart (transport vessel)⁷ from Lampaul had given the name *Karreg ar C'hristof* ('Christophe's rock') and, during the discussion, he spontaneously provided an additional form, *Karreg Kristof Vraz* ('the rock of big Christophe'), as a variant, specifying that it was not an 'official' or 'real' name in the sense that he remembered Christophe Lucas very well. *Kristof Vraz* was 50 years older than the informant but was still known by his nickname.

During the interviews, interesting anecdotes resurfaced about the aforementioned Kristof, in particular, details concerning the shipwreck of a gabbart named the 'Victor'. The informant's statements were later corroborated, thanks to the seafarer's identification number: Christophe Lucas had indeed embarked on the Victor in 1907 and, strangely, had disembarked on the island of Groix (and not at Le Conquet, as should have been the case). It is in fact necessary to know how to listen to talkative informants who are eager to tell stories about the names they give. This is an extract of the informant's recollections and provides a clear example of the kinds of anecdotes often associated with the elicited toponyms:

He was on board when the 'Victor' went down. Loaded with wood or coke, the ship was leaving Quimper for the Conquet. The weather was bad when they left the port, and Moutoñ, the boss — a Russaouen from Keryevel — was asleep in his bunk. Kristof Vraz, at the helm, was worried that the weather was going to get worse...

– Don't you think we'd better head for Loctudy? This is not any kind of weather to sail anywhere in!

– No, no! We've already gone too far!

The sea was getting rougher and rougher, and gale force winds were blowing. Once at sea, the mainsail tore under the force of the wind, and a wave tore off the coach-roof! The crew cut the sail to cover the hole, but the seawater was still pouring in the hold, and the 'Victor' was gradually sinking. Fortunately, two returning tuna boats came to their rescue. The first one failed to get close enough, but the second one did and the crew leapt aboard.

7. Cf. Bethell 1993. In this article, the author studies the geographical distribution of the term *gabbart* and its linguistic variants. It is spread across a territory west of the Greenwich Meridian between Aquitaine and Scotland, including Ireland and Wales. The term is totally absent in the Mediterranean. The etymology of 'gabbart' is uncertain but possibly Celtic. Léon Fleuriot (1980: 211) notes the existence of Old Breton *caubal* in *Cartulary of Redon*, chart 207, with the definition of 'a kind of vessel'.

Moutoñ broke his leg when he landed on the deck! Moutoñ, Kristof Vraz and Jakez Kolo were all put ashore in Lorient.⁸

The notion of what constitutes a ‘real’ name in the mind of the former gabARRIER is no less interesting. It shows that the *Arvoriz* have a dual vision of their environment: there are official community names, which they assume are shared by all, and nicknames used in a more clannish,⁹ almost confidential register. This is why they have quite a hard time understanding why a researcher would be interested in entering a family’s intimacy, by writing down names that are only used by them. “These names are used between us...” Sometimes, the toponym is associated with a nickname that one does not wish to communicate to an outsider, for fear of being disloyal to one’s social group. In such tightly-knit communities, one does not want to cause offence to any neighbour and face the risk of being shunned.

Religion also has its part to play here: “woe unto him, through whom offences come” (Luke 17:1). But most of the time, withholding names/nicknames is simply so natural that the informant will not even think of providing them. One can speak of an almost unconscious withholding of such private information. This is where the talent and experience of the collector make a big difference.

Alain Le Berre suggested:

Any investigation begins with an observation on the spot, then with the reading of the map; the informant is then given complete freedom to develop his memories and to chain them together according to his memory. Only then can the great effort of maieutic work begin, and, thanks to the flexible application of the plan determined by the lexicon, the initial results can be doubled.¹⁰

To do so, the command of vernacular Breton, the usual working language of most informants, is critically important, because in this natural linguistic context, names buried in a corner of the memory naturally resurface. I experienced this personally. After interviewing an informant in French, I returned later and conducted an interview with the same person in Breton and, in this way, managed to glean some valuable new information that could not have been elicited in French.

8. For a complete ethnographic study of the community of seafarers of Lampaul-Plouarzel invested in demarcation or cabotage (maritime transport) see Riou 2011.

9. This notion of an extended family, based on solidarity, is confirmed by many old and hereditary nicknames, which thus strengthens clan membership.

10. “Toute enquête commence par une observation sur place, puis par la lecture de la carte; entière liberté est alors laissée à l’informateur pour développer ses souvenirs et les enchaîner selon sa mémoire. Le grand effort de maieutique commence seulement ensuite, et, en appliquant avec souplesse le plan établi par le lexique, on arrive à doubler les résultats initiaux” (Le Berre 1966: 44).

I recall my first interview in Breton with Mathurin Allançon, who was born in 1905. He was a retired gabARRIER and had spent his first years as an apprentice seaman sailing between Brittany and Wales. He was a fascinating and precise man whom I saw regularly because he was my maternal grandfather's brother-in-law. Thanks to this family connection, he was one of the first people I consulted with the aim of producing a nautical toponymy map of Lampaul. In 1993, during our first interview, conducted entirely in Breton, my great-uncle spontaneously specified two names on a rocky massif called *Ar Roc'h*: *Kreiz ar Roc'h* ('middle of "rock"/*Roc'h*') and *Penn ar Roc'h* ('the end of *Roc'h*').

Some might think that these names are not very valuable because they are purely descriptive. However, it was the EOL's position that they deserve their place in a toponymic inventory every bit as much as any town name, like Perros (*Penn ar roz*: 'the end of the hill') or Paimpol (*penn ar poull*: 'the end of the pool'). No one would even imagine denying these towns their status as place names.

Mathurin Allançon went on to provide another toponym, *Poull Lapig*, that none of my other informants had ever mentioned (nor would have thought of mentioning) when speaking French. This name designates a freshwater pool at the foot of a cliff near Pors-Scaff. The meaning of *Poull Lapig* is no longer understood today but *lapig* should probably be interpreted as being composed of *lap* (a deverbal noun from French *laper*, a cognate of English 'to lap') + the Breton diminutive suffix *-ig* ('the pool of little laps'). It gets its name because the sea waves 'lap' this freshwater pool at every high tide. For this reason, it is indeed a genuine maritime toponym.

Collecting information from different maritime communities can reveal discrepancies in the naming of a site. *Porz Gored*¹¹ ('the port of the weir'), on Lampaul-Plouarzel shore, is known by the sailors of Trézien as *Toull ar Stripou* ('the hole of the entrails'). The latter name, unknown to the inhabitants of Lampaul, probably refers to the sinking of an English refrigerated steamer by a German submarine in World War I. Its load of meat washed up on the shore in question. Anecdotes about this wartime event were common during field investigations (Riou 2005: 5–13). But generally speaking, in those areas of the coast that have been continuously inhabited, the toponyms used are rather homogeneous. It does not matter whether the administration has redefined the parish borders. Things get complicated offshore when the seamen who navigate in these areas are not in daily contact and only occasionally meet in these areas. We were able to observe this to the south of the Molène archipelago, a territory frequented by all the maritime communities of the Iroise Sea. A remarkable boulder, rising ten metres above the lowest tides that are indicated on nautical charts, is called *ar Youc'h* by the people from Molène. This is the

11. The term *kored/lar gored* is no longer understood by the Bretons contacted, not even by the older ones, born around 1890.

usual word in western Léon to designate a high, almost pointed rock. The seasonal seaweed gatherers (or *goémoniers*) of Saint-Pabu call it *ar Bos Teo* ('the big shoal') and the fishermen of the island of Sein name it *ar Faot* (unknown etymology).

Macrotoponyms can also be affected by toponymic polymorphism. The Pointe de Corsen, for example, in Plouarzel, the westernmost point of the continent in Finistère, is generally called *Beg Korzenn*. The local people call it *Beg ar Chach* ('the point or headland of the dogs'); in Le Conquet, people speak of *Beg Paol* ('Saint Paul's point'). The Bretons are very close to their saints, which generally dispenses them from specifying the name with the term *sant* ('saint'), and the fishermen of Portsall use several forms: *ar Beg Pell* ('the distant point'), *ar Beg Braz* ('the great point') or *ar Beg Du* ('the black point').

2.1 Distant place names

It is not surprising to find references to people from the island of Sein in a work devoted to Léonard toponymy. Intrigued by a few names off the Pointe Saint Mathieu that none of our very good informants knew, it was Per Pondaven who decided to conduct the survey around the island of Sein. He met three retired fishermen who were able to give him names as far north as Ouessant and who used the names we were asking about, especially those using *plasenn* ('shoal'). The conclusion was clear and instructive: when the Beautemps-Beaupré team came to map the area at the beginning of the 19th century, they relied on the knowledge of local pilots, and those from the island of Sein therefore informed hydrographers of nautical names up to the south of the island of Béniguet, in the Léonard zone.

As far as this last example is concerned, it is clear that the territorial notion of maritime communities is not restricted by parish borders and this is probably a topic that needs to be explored more deeply in terms of fieldwork methodology. The search for place names is often subconsciously associated with cartographer's interests: the desire to record authentic names for a given territory, in fact, to make a map as honestly and accurately as possible. It is therefore natural to ask the people in the local communities that live there. The process of making an inventory of all the toponyms used by a given maritime group is more demanding and is really a matter of ethno-toponymy. Thus, a researcher questioning the fishermen of the island of Sein cannot be satisfied by simply recording the names of only the most dangerous rocks, shoals or reefs around the island. He/she would have to work on the entire Iroise Sea, as Per Pondaven did around Molène, and also on the coasts of Portugal since the most daring of the Sein fishermen ventured that far south to fish for lobster. This work has never been done to our knowledge and, unfortunately, it must be admitted that it is a little late to do it, even if the Breton language was still very

much alive on the Island of Sein in 2014.¹²

I undertook such a study with the last Breton *gabbarriers* of Lampaul-Plouarzel. The research done by Bernard Cadoret and his team (1985) enabled us to discover how long this activity has been going on in the Iroise Sea and to discover the usual destinations of the Lampaul seamen: Brest, Landerneau, Port-Launay, Audierne... It was thus legitimate to question the *gabbarriers* about the names of the landmarks of their maritime routes. The toponymy that I collected is not, as one can imagine, very dense. The *gabbarriers*, who practise *bornage* ('small-scale coastal trade between two points'), are generally satisfied with macrotoponyms; their needs are not the same as those of fishermen or seaweed gatherers, for example.

Maps of *gabbarrier* toponymy have been presented in *Paroles de Gabbarriers*.¹³ Toponyms located on the Léonard coast were presented and commented on in EOL publications. One can mention *Bae ar Bopred* ('the Bay of the bowsprit'), located north of Pointe Saint-Mathieu, a small bay sheltered from the violent currents, in which the *gabbarriers* would take refuge when they arrived too late to 'pass Saint-Mathieu'. These sailors took advantage of the tides as a natural lift to get to Brest. They left Lampaul at full tide, i.e. when the sea is high, and headed south thanks to the ebb tide, the current being linked to the tide is going out. But six hours later, it was the other way round: the tide would rise again and those who had not yet been able to get round the Pointe Saint-Mathieu had to wait in the shelter of the current or else risk having their vessel driven back by the current back to where they had come from! This lovely toponym could only have been collected from the *gabbarriers* and one should know how to take advantage of the wise remarks that explain its existence. Informants are generally good teachers and are as patient as Job. In the company of these *gabbarriers*, it was possible for me to mention more distant destinations: *Enez Vaz* (l'Île de Batz), *Montroulez* (Morlaix), *Kemper* (Quimper), *Konkerne* (Concarneau), but also *Naoned* (Nantes), *Bourdel* (Bordeaux), an *Ôr Nevez* (Le Havre), *Londrez* (London)... names that belong as much to Lampaul's onomastic heritage as *Porz Paol* (the port of Saint Paul, just to the south of Lampaul) or *Porz Skaf* (the port of the escaffé, directly to the north of Lampaul), the two ports of the town.

It was precisely from *Porz Paol* that a seaweed gathering flotilla used to set sail daily during the season towards the south of the Molène archipelago. The history of this community of fishermen-seaweed gatherers (or *goémoniers*) has not been studied and is therefore not well known. Mikael Madeg, during his first visits to

12. During field surveys, Christian Fagon and myself discovered an unusual lexical richness. In particular, we noted the attestation of the names *ar mor klei* and *ar mor diou*, which respectively designate the sea to the north of the island (to the left *-klei-* of the island when looking east) and to the south of the island (to the right *-diou-* when looking east). A lexicon of islander Breton was published in Fagon and Riou 2015.

13. Cf. Riou 2011, page 304 for the Aulne ('the Châteaulin river'), 314 for the Elorn ('the Landerneau river'), 291 and 293 for Brest commercial port and its surroundings.

Trézien and Lampaul, did not measure the importance of the phenomenon, nor the toponymic richness that could result from it.¹⁴ One must imagine, in the 1930s, about 30 sloops leaving *Porz Paol* with the tide to go to Quéménès and Béniguet islands and the surrounding reefs or islets. These sailors also took advantage of the natural lift described above to reach places located about 12 kilometres from their home port. There, they cut kelp seaweed in particular. An even larger flotilla, taking women and children with them, would sail there at high tide to pull the precious ‘little seaweed’ (*Chondrus crispus*) out of the rocks. The result of this community activity was a real colonisation of these islands and their surroundings, a *de facto* appropriation that resulted in a massive creation of toponyms: more than a hundred names were collected during the summer of 1999 (cf. Madeg et al. 2004). They are distributed as follows: 20 around Triélen, 30 around Quéménès, 30 around Litiri and 25 around Béniguet. In order to assess these figures, it would be necessary to define the notion of toponymic density, which would be expressed according to toponyms per zone, for example, which would require the ability to easily evaluate the surface areas of the foreshore in particular. By way of comparison, it can be noted that on the Lampaul coastline, 140 toponyms were collected, for a coastal distance of about seven kilometres.

It should be noted that some *Porz Paol goémoniers* spent entire winters as sub-tenants on the islands of Béniguet and Quéménès. They came there, some with their families, to collect seaweed on the beaches and lived in deplorable conditions, generally dwelling in primitive shelters constructed on the lee shore that were protected from the prevailing winds.

Ultimately, the southern part of the Molène archipelago appears to be a natural extension of Lampaul-Trézien, where the *Porz-Paol goémoniers* felt at home for more than a century. Their descendants benefit from this heritage: many of them continue to fish lady crabs and abalones at low tide (and especially neap tides) and some of them have managed to keep the ‘small seaweed’ activity going despite recent legislation (2008) that dealt a severe blow to this shared popular activity. This is a shame because what was left of the flotilla continued to sail to Quéménès and Béniguet to collect the small seaweed. The oldest of these people still spoke Breton among themselves and named the rocks according to their predecessors’ traditional logic. The following ones are just a few of the most recent creations: *Sklosenn Feñch al Lannig* (‘François of Lannic’s shoal’; François used to work there), *Sklosenn an Eiz Sahad* (‘the shoal with eight bagfuls’: the ninth bag of small seaweed was never filled) or the humorous *Sklosenn ar Boan Gein* (‘the shoal of back pain’; which speaks for itself!). All three names date from the 1980s.

14. See Madeg 1991. Only three informants are mentioned for Lampaul and Trézien: Henri Tassin, who owned the island of Quéménès; Marcel Quéméneur, who rented the farm on the island of Triélen; and Jakig Jourden, fisherman-*goémonier* from Rumeur in Trézien.

2.2 Highlighting the results of toponymic surveys

To date, no table of the 20,000 nautical toponyms of Léon has been drawn up. However, it is being compiled, and once completed, it will be possible to draw many lessons from it and will be a highly valuable document for all specialists of the Breton seaside: historians, linguists, biologists, ethnologists... A minimum knowledge of Léonard Breton dialect¹⁵ will nonetheless remain a prerequisite to access the comments that accompany each name.

Mikael Madeg, the founder of the EOL, has not yet exploited the enormous mass of names and comments at his disposal, over which he has an obvious legitimacy. He has a keen interest in writing novels and studying nicknames and local legends, and has probably not had the time to devote himself to a synthesis of toponymic collection, especially since he has established himself as a publisher. Recently retired, he still has a lot on his plate.¹⁶ However, it is worth mentioning *Peñse e Bro-Leon*, published in 2007, a book accompanied by a CD with the testimonies and eyewitness accounts of *Arvoriz* from Léon about the recovery of all kinds of shipwrecks along the coast. He is also the author of a fact-filled article (Madeg 1992) of non-lexicographical words that he collected along the Léonard coast. It gives a vivid account of the author's amazement at the abundant wealth of vocabulary and expressions of the Léonards that he encountered on the coast during his toponymic surveys.¹⁷

Per Pondaven, who was the most experienced seaman of the three members of the EOL,¹⁸ had very early on begun to analyse the fruit of his labour. His regular discussions with his friend and neighbour Pierre Arzel probably had something to do with it. In 1992, he published 'The study of some toponyms revealing the presence of old fishing weirs on the western Léon coastline' (Pondaven 1992), divulging how our ancestors left us names that, even if they are no longer understood today, can contribute to a better understanding of the history of fishing. One year later, he published another article (Pondaven 1993), offering an original discovery of the *abers* ('estuaries') of Bas-Léon through the prism of toponyms that he collected and commented on for the benefit of those not familiar with maritime communities. Maritime history, legends, saints' lives and dialectology are thus made available to everyone.

15. We are often asked the question "Why do you publish your toponymy research in Breton?" One answer, from Mikael Madeg, is: "What would we say about a Russian or American "specialist" of French literature or French history, who would only know Russian or English? We would laugh in his face" (Madeg 2010: 112).

16. Since 2007, he has published an average of seven books per year. See http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikael_Madeg

17. Since the beginning of 2015, Mikael Madeg has been working on the creation of a Breton dictionary of Léon. He estimates this to be a ten-year-long project. See, for example, Madeg 2018. *Arvor* Breton will certainly figure prominently.

18. See Pondaven and Riou 2009: 165–72.

The elaboration of lexicons is the logical outcome for fieldwork. It is necessary to provide non-specialists with the basic keys to better understand the collected toponyms. Admiral Dyèvre had, as early as 1962, published a geographical lexicon (1962, 1991) in which the most frequent terms in the collection carried out under his direction were explained. Mikael Madeg (2010: 119–29) also published a basic Léonard toponymic vocabulary, which goes beyond the framework of nautical toponymy in the strict sense of the term. Per Pondaven, for his part, worked on the elaboration of a lexicon resulting from his collection and presentation of the vocabulary attested in nautical toponymy and understood by the Breton-speaking informants contacted (Pondaven 2009). The first part of this posthumous book deals with descriptive toponymic terms, the second part deals with vocabulary relating to the sea in general and the third part, which is not the least interesting, displays technical vocabulary of fishing as it was understood by the Breton fishermen-*goémoniers*. This work was in progress when its author perished at sea in January 2008.

2.2.1 Popular rhymes and sayings

Toponyms are sometimes associated with a saying. Per and myself were very fond of this ‘short genre’ and collected quite a number of these, which are so dear to my friend and fellow collector, Daniel Giraudon. Here are a few examples that we offered to the general public in 2003:

E Toull ar Veoc’h
Serr da lien ha chom peoc’h!

In ‘the Cow’s Hole’,
 Lower your sail and shut up!

This saying, which gives a good idea of seafarers’ sense of humour, also has a preventive and even educational function. Seamen are confronted with a treacherous environment and must know how to deal with it. It is not the sea that must adapt to man but the opposite. The *Toull ar Veoc’h* in question refers to a hazardous channel to the north-east of the island of Béniguet. The currents there are very violent with a high tidal range and the surrounding area is strewn with rocks lurking above and below the sea surface. Therefore, in sailing times, it was preferable to hold one’s breath while sailing through this area.

E Lahaouog
E vez paket meur a henaouog

In Lahaouog
Many a fool gets caught.

In this case, we are dealing with a saying known only to the families around Argenton. *Lahaouog*¹⁹ is the name for a reef on a large foreshore area between the island of Yock and the mainland. Fishing enthusiasts who linger there a little too long gathering shrimp when the tide rises have no other choice but to take shelter on this rock and wait for the next tide to return to the mainland, all this under the scornful, teasing eyes of the Argenton inhabitants. *Gand ar vez!* ('Shame on them!' lit. 'with shame / humiliation!'). It is probably to avoid such embarrassment, which is so badly accepted in these maritime communities, that the *Arvoriz* of the area passed on this saying to their children. The educational aim is obvious and very revealing of the mentality of the people.

Many other sayings, some of which are a little on the bawdy side, reveal a trait of the people along the seaside (see Pondaven and Riou 2012), which, illustrated with cartoons by Nono, promises to provide the reader with a good laugh.

2.2.2 Toponymy: a tool for archaeologists

We know that archaeologists are interested in microtoponymy (plot names) on a prospective basis. Hervé Kerebel was able, for instance, to establish a link between the toponym Cruguel and the presence of a cairn (Kerebel 1988). However, one must be cautious regarding the induced information, as was demonstrated by Yohann Sparfel and Yvan Pailler concerning the location of menhirs (Sparfel & Pailler 2010: 41–5). As far as nautical toponymy is concerned, it is the DRASSM (Department of Underwater and Submarine Archaeological Research) and the ADRAMAR (Association for the Development of Maritime Archaeological Research) that show interest in the work of the EOL.

A toponym such as *Toull ar Glaou* (the coal hole), spotted off the coast of Kerlouan, allowed them to detect the wreck of a coal-carrying steamer. But they also face the problem of the lack of a table listing the 20,000 toponyms, as well as the French translations to access the comments.²⁰ In this example we can, once again, see that a toponym conceals within itself information that a wise researcher can

19. The suffix *-og* is very common on the coastline of Bas-Léon. It is also attested at the end of the Crozon Peninsula, as well as on the islands of Batz and Sein. If it presents a sign of archaism, the linguist Kenneth Jackson sees in it a regression of the evolution *-oc>-euc>-ec* that took place everywhere else in Breton-speaking Brittany. *-Og* suffixes were also found in anthroponyms during our field investigations: *Cheunog* (Yves), *Jilog* (Achille), *Filog* (Théophile), *Biog* (Yann + Mari > Yann-Vari > Vi > Bi > Biog... as Jean-Marie), *Yannog* (Jean) or *Feityog* (Hervé > Herveig > Veig > Feik > Feikog...). These forms often have a pejorative connotation.

20. Another problem, which is significant, is related to the system chosen to locate toponyms: a system of Cartesian coordinates (abscissa-ordinate), (x,y) from an origin defined on maps that are no longer available in stores.

exploit. Even at the end of the oral tradition, we can decipher the landscape thanks to the names bequeathed by our elders. But it is still necessary to take the trouble to collect this very fragile nautical toponymy from the last speakers to have worked on the coast, following in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents. As Per Pondaven expressed it, “Orality is a very fragile means of transmission, but it represents the fine thread of ancestral continuity that each generation extends a little further” (Pondaven 2002: 99–101).

In today’s world, the break in the transmission of these toponyms is patently obvious, if only because it is dependent on a dying popular language, whether it be the Gallo-speaking region of eastern Brittany or the Breton-speaking region of western Brittany. The safeguarding of Breton nautical toponymy outside of Léon, is now more urgent than ever, and is now in the hands of our political leaders, who are the only ones who could organise and finance a vast survey of the entire Brittany coast.

3. Conclusion

Nautical toponymy collected in the spirit of the EOL is an efficient means to gain access to coastal communities that are often reputed to be closed. Creating a network of knowledgeable informants is an ideal platform for dialectal and ethnographic research, which is not the least of its advantages.

Our wish, and I am speaking here on behalf of the members of the EOL, is to see other investigators continue the work of systematically collecting toponyms along the coast of Brittany, an activity that is all too often portrayed in a trivial and superficial light.

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Further reading

The surveys carried out at the initiative of Admiral Dyèvre were all published in the *Annals of Hydrography*. Below, we provide the exhaustive list of the studies carried out. The numbers in brackets indicate the toponym numbers following the referencing logic chosen by Admiral Dyèvre at the beginning of the surveys. The list of publications is therefore given in ascending order of these numbers.

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The surveys carried out on the initiative of Mikael Madeg have all been published by *Ar Skol Vrezoneg / Emgleo Breiz*. The series contains 15 volumes (the first was revised and expanded in Pondaven, Madeg & Riou 2004). The publications are listed in chronological order. Note that they are all written in Breton. A trilingual introduction allows English speakers to understand the approach adopted by the authors. Each volume is accompanied by a list of informants.

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