

BRO NEVEZ

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BRETON LANGUAGE
NEWSLETTER OF THE U.S. BRANCH



FEST-NOZ
Folk dance + live music
Hungarian House 213 East 82nd Street New York
1st Anniversary of **BAGAD NEW YORK**
\$20 (\$15 on reservation)
Sat
Nov
20th
8pm

Let's dance! / Dansomp Breman!
Bagad New York / Calum Pasqua / Tom Pixton
Alex Bartholomew / Sean Buchta / Stephen
Gara / Nick Hudson / Mike MacNinch / Samuel
Frère / Yoann Le Goff / Jake Otto & Guests
Organized by Bagad New York
501(c)3 Non for profit Organisation www.bagad.us

Happy First Anniversary to the
Bagad New York

KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

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NEW ADDRESS & E-MAIL (same telephone)

Lois Kuter, Editor
605 Montgomery Road
Ambler, PA 19002 U.S.A.

(215) 886-6361
loiskuter@verizon.net

U.S. ICDBL website: **www.icdbl.org**
Also available via: www.breizh.net/icdbl.htm

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The U.S. ICDBL provides Bro Nevez on a complimentary basis to a number of language and cultural organizations in Brittany to show our support for their work. Your Membership/Subscription allows us to do this. Membership (which includes subscription) for one year is \$20. Checks should be in U.S. dollars, made payable to "U.S. ICDBL" and mailed to Lois Kuter at the address above.

Ideas expressed within this newsletter are those of the individual authors, and do not necessarily represent ICDBL philosophy or policy.


For information about the Canadian ICDBL contact: Jeffrey D. O'Neill, PO Box 14611, 50 Bloor Street East, Toronto, Ontario, M8L-5R3, CANADA (e-mail: jdkoneil@hotmail.com). Telephone: (416) 264-0475.



Editorial

This issue of Bro Nevez features the fest noz, a unique dance event for the many traditional dances of Brittany and the music that provides the rhythm to put them into motion. This was an event reinvented in the 1950s in the post-war period, and I have chosen to also include an article by Polig Monjarret that gives a flavor for this period. There are a wealth of festivals, concerts, festoù-noz, and music competitions and events of all kinds in Brittany today where singers, musicians, and dancers perform traditional songs, tunes, and dances handed down through generations or newly arranged or composed. This abundance should not be taken for granted as something that has just naturally happened. In the post-war period expressing one's Breton identity was neither fashionable nor "politically correct" (it could in fact be quite dangerous!). It took a great deal of work on the part of Bretons throughout Brittany to insure that Breton culture – including the Breton language and Gallo - had the chance to survive periods when becoming French (in language and culture) seemed to be the only option to be a good French citizen.



Lois Kuter 

New School Year for the Breton Language

Statistics for this 2010-2011 school year were more difficult to come by compared to past years when all sorts of numbers were posted by Ofis ar Brezhoneg to show where things stood in the three school streams – Diwan (immersion schools for Breton), Div Yezh (bilingual programs in the public schools) and Dihun (bilingual program in the Catholic schools).

The numbers quoted for this school year vary but it is clear that the number of children in bilingual and immersion Breton language programs continues to climb slowly overall.

According to a short report posted on the Ofis ar Brezhoneg website (October 1), there were a total of 13,450 students in these programs in 400 different sites at the beginning of this 2010-2011 school year. This is an increase of 3.18% from last year. Diwan saw the biggest growth with a 4.77% increase (an increase of 152 students). Div Yezh experienced a 3.36% growth (with an additional 213 students), and Dihun had just a 1.85% growth (a gain of 59 students). Finistère is where

most students are found with 6,000 students in this department of western Brittany.

The count for the Catholic schools, however, is in question. Div Yezh notes on its website that statistics provided by the *Enseignement Catholique* give a total of 4,503 students but this includes some programs where students are getting a minimum amount of Breton – programs that should not be counted as bilingual ones. Dihun cites the true total as 4,426 for students in bilingual programs. And this would be a loss of 19 from the previous school year, which reflects the lack of support the Catholic school system has been giving bilingual programs. This would be the first time in its 20 years that children in the bilingual programs in Catholic schools actually went down.

Newspaper articles in the Le Télégramme newspaper (September 29, 2010) and Ouest France (October 4, 2010) give totals of 13,391 and 13,450 respectively for the total number of children in bilingual programs (with 3,361 in the Diwan schools, 5,605 in the Div Yezh public schools. If the true total for Dihun bilingual program students in Catholic schools is 4,426 then the total would be 13,392.

While the continued growth in numbers (at least for Diwan and Div Yezh) is a good sign, the chance to learn Breton in a bilingual program or immersion program still remains quite limited when you look at the total numbers of children in schools of Brittany. Children in these programs represent only 1.53% of the school age population (with 3.46% in Finistère).

Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg / Public Office for the Breton Language

Created in 1999 at the initiative of the Region of Brittany, Ofis ar Brezhoneg was officially transformed this past June into an “Établissement public de coopération culturelle” (EPCC) with a new name, Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg – Office publique de la langue bretonne. On October 15 it held the first meeting of its new Administrative Council marking a new era for this organization. This new public designation gives more permanence and should strengthen the work already undertaken by this organization for the Breton language. Besides continuing the projects undertaken by Ofis ar Brezhoneg, this newly structured organization will focus on developing bilingual Breton programs in the schools.

The first meeting of the Administrative Council for Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg was attended by the Prefect of the Region of Brittany (Michel Cadot), the President of the Region of Brittany (Jean-Yves Le Drian), the Rector of the Academy of Rennes (Alain Miossec), the Vice

President of the Regional Council for Languages of Brittany (Lena Louarn), the Vice-President of the General Council of the Loire-Atlantique (Yannick Lebeaupin), the Delegate for the Breton Language to the General Council of Finistère (André Le Gac), General Councilor of Ille et Vilaine (Marial Gabillard), General Councilor of the Côtes d’Armor (Janine Le Behec) and the Mayor of Carhaix (Christian Troadec) where the office is based.

Representatives for Diwan Breizh (Patrick Herve), Div Yezh (Paul Molac) and Dihun Breizh (Yannig Baron) will also serve on the Administrative Council. Beranrd le Roux, who has directed Breton language programming for France 3 Bretagne, and Gwenola Sohier-Roparz, pedagogy inspector for Breton language and culture, were also named to the Council. Lena Louarn was elected President and Fulup Jakez Director for the Ofis Publik.

For more information see www.ofis-bzh.org



Ar Redadeg

You have read about this fund-raiser relay “race” for the Breton language in past issues of Bro Nevez, and this has been supported by the U.S. ICDBL as well as by some of our individual members. Inspired by the Basque Korrika, this race was organized first in 2008 with a 600 kilometer run from Nantes to Carhaix to benefit Diwan. In 2010 the route was doubled to 1,200 kilometers with each kilometer sponsored by businesses, organizations and individuals. Nearly 130,000 euros were raised, with 49,100 going to Diwan and the rest split between six other projects for the Breton language and culture:

- Ar buhezour nature* - a project in La Chapelle Neuve for a Breton language nature program
- C'hoariva evit ar grennarded* - a Breton language theater piece on history for teens created by Strollad ar vro bagan
- Breizh Akademi* - vacation programs organized by Studi ha Dudi for teens to learn Breton
- Web Radio* - Breton language radio programming using the internet produced by four radio stations of Brudañ ha Skignan
- Levrioù da selaou* - Breton audio-books for adults prepared by Al Liamm
- Tap da roched 'ta* - workshops in Breton for gouren (Breton wrestling) put together by Gouren Côtes d’Armor.

In another two years' time, the summer of 2012, the run will cover 1,500 kilometers in 7 days and 6 nights and benefit new projects.



The Fest Noz

Lois Kuter

UNESCO and the recognition of immaterial cultural patrimony

You may be wondering what the fancy phrase “immaterial cultural patrimony” means. This is simply the part of a people’s heritage that are passed down primarily through a non-written tradition – things that are not buildings, works of art or written literature, but things like music, dance, sports, ritual and festive traditions, or the know-how and knowledge to fabricate crafts and define ones relationship to the countryside and sea.

In 2006 France ratified the Convention for the Protection of Immaterial Cultural Patrimony which was adopted by UNESCO in 2003. In Brittany, Dastum and the Institut Régional du Patrimoine (IRP) have organized a working group to identify Brittany’s immaterial patrimony and to encourage everyone to work for its recognition by UNESCO. In doing this Bretons can identify measures and actions needed to protect and support key cultural elements that do not have institutional support or governmental protection.

To start, three elements of Breton culture have been identified to be listed by UNESCO for recognition and protection: the fest noz, “songs for listening” (for example, the Breton language *gwerz* and the French language *complainte*), and traditional Breton sports and games.

For March 2011 a dossier is being prepared to get recognition for the fest noz as a “representative element” of the immaterial cultural patrimony of Brittany. This dossier will define what a fest noz is, give its history, describe its actual state, and what may threaten its future health. The dossier will also identify what is needed to keep the fest noz going strong (things already being done, as well as things that are needed). This may include some nuts and bolts like having an appropriate space to dance, but also what is needed to indirectly keep this tradition alive such as the transmission of traditional music and song (whose health relies on the future of the Breton language in the case of *kan ha diskann*), or the opportunity for young people to learn how to dance or play a musical instrument. Bretons are being asked to give their ideas about all of this and to also sign a petition in favor of getting the fest noz on the UNESCO list. Support for this is being asked of municipalities and organizations in Brittany as well as individuals. To learn more and to sign a petition, go to the Dastum website

www.dastum.net and find the section called “A propos du patrimoine culturel immatériel.” And while you are on the Dastum website, learn about this important organization and everything it does to support oral traditions and promote music of Brittany.

Now that you know that a movement is a-foot in Brittany to support the “fest noz” as an important element of Breton culture, it’s a good idea to introduce this unique event. I look forward to seeing the dossier Dastum will put together in the coming months, but in the meantime, I have put together a bit of history and my own thoughts about the fest noz.

Lois Kuter’s Presentation of the Fest noz

Literally “night festival.” a fest noz is an event where you go to dance the dances of Brittany. A fest deiz is a dance found in the afternoon. But there is much more to it than that.

The event called a fest noz today is rooted in a long tradition of dancing in Brittany. The dances one finds today at this event are uniquely Breton. Even if Bretons have incorporated some dances from other cultures such as polkas or mazurkas, for example, these are not the polka the Polish American community dances in Wisconsin, nor is it the mazurka danced in Poland. Some Breton dances have changed over time in steps and style, while others look pretty much as they did a century or more ago. What makes a fest noz unique is not just the fact that it is an occasion to perpetuate and continue the evolution of uniquely Breton dances and music, but the fact that it is a celebration of community. Bretons come together to participate in a living heritage, not to do some kind of reenactment of the old days, or a presentation of old traditions to an audience. There really is no audience at a fest noz.

The fest noz as a particular event where people dance (and share some food and drink) is traced to an event of this name that was found in the Upper Cornouaille region of rural central western Brittany in past centuries – a gathering with dance, singing and story-telling that culminated a big work event – harvesting potatoes or apples, pounding down a new dirt floor to the threshing yard, or other tasks that required an extended family and neighbors. With changes in agriculture such as the introduction of machines like the tractor which took away the need for such gatherings, the occasion for a fest noz diminished in the early 20th century.

Access to new media (radio and much later, television) as well as wider travel, meant that Bretons in rural areas were exposed to other music and dance styles. While Bretons have always traveled by sea throughout the world, the relative isolation of inland areas was broken down by train (with major east-west lines built by

the late 1860s and smaller lines by the 1920s) and automobile travel. New music like jazz became fashionable and accessible. Breton pipers and bombarde players often took up saxophones and accordions in the 1920s and 30s to accommodate changing tastes and new social occasions for dancing.

During World War II local gatherings to sing and dance were reinvigorated by travel restrictions, and the “fest noz” saw a regain in popularity. In the post war period there was a new decline in interest in the “old” traditions as young people moved out of rural areas and new entertainment options opened up. And this was the period when Bretons were convinced that they needed to help their children get ahead in the world by encouraging them to speak only French. The decline of kan ha diskant singing as well as other Breton language song was closely tied to a decline in the Breton language ... itself linked to a changing and complex social and economic climate. Nevertheless, traditional dances and the kan ha diskant style of responsive singing that powered them in central western Brittany never disappeared, and a regain in interest was fostered by individuals and organizations concerned with the survival of Breton culture who organized events where singers could gather.

In the post war period the old fest noz was no longer a viable part of the work cycle of rural society, but there were Bretons rooted in these rural communities who recognized the need to create new occasions where kan ha diskant singing, the paired playing of biniou and bombarde, the long ballads (gwerz), and storytelling could be encouraged. The idea that the Breton language would be strengthened as new generations learned to sing these songs was certainly part of the initiative to create new occasions for people to gather. The “fest noz” of the 1950s was a new event in many ways where singers were no longer part of the dancing circle but on a stage in front of a microphone. The rhythm of the singing of the new fest noz would more closely match the rhythm of the dance, whereas in the old fest noz it was the storytelling nature of a song that was most important.

Two people in particular stand out in the renaissance of kan ha diskant singing and the evolution of a new fest noz – Albert Trevidic and Loeiz Ropars. Trevidic was very active in teaching Breton and in supporting Breton wrestling (gouren) and traditional games as well as music and dance. He helped found the Kelc’h Keltieg Ahes in 1946. While the fest noz was not quite dead yet in the Cornouaille, Trevidic was active in organizing a new type of gathering in the area of Carhaix – first in 1948 in Tréogan. He would later preside over the Amicale des festou noz des Montagnes created in 1963 to coordinate dates for these events.

Loeiz Ropars is better known than Albert Trevidic for his work to encourage singers to gather for kan ha diskant and other songs, and he organized singers in Poullaouen as early as 1939 who sang at various festivals in Brittany and then helped to found the Cercle Celtique de Poullaouen (Mesaerien Poullaouen) more formally in 1949 whose kan ha diskant singers would perform at different folk festivals of Brittany and Europe. Ropars launched a series of events for kan ha diskant including contests for singers starting in 1954 in Poullaouen with two more there in 1955 and 1956 where dancing would naturally be part of the event. Festival/contests for kan ha diskant followed in Spezet in 1957, Chateauneuf in 1958, and Gourin, in 1959, and these gatherings would include ballads, stories and theater – all in the Breton language of the area. As part of a camp for young Breton speakers – and Ropars was very active as a Breton teacher – what is described as the first public fest noz was held in Poullaouen in 1955, with another in St. Herbot in 1957. While the fest noz of these years would include only the dance(s) of the area in which it was held – gavotte or plinn or fisel – the bal breton was designed to include a number of different dances. Through the organization Studi ha Koroll and then Al Leur Nevez, Ropars would organize a number of bals breton from 1958 to 1978. These incorporated Breton language workshops and gatherings of older masters and younger learners to learn Breton song and dance.

For both Albert Trevidic and Loeiz Ropars the idea of the “new” fest noz was to create an event where older singers would be encouraged to sing and where young people would be encouraged to learn and use the Breton language and be part of the transmission of musical traditions. They were by no means alone. In other areas of Brittany, too, Bretons were acting on a love for traditional song and dance, collecting from older masters not just to put tunes down on paper or on a tape recording for posterity, but to keep this repertoire alive by creating opportunities for performance. The *cercle celtique* (Celtic Circle) often served to gather individuals with this common desire. This was the case in central western Brittany where the work of Ropars served as a model. But, a parallel movement was occurring in Gallo Brittany in the early 1950s where Albert Poulain, Jean Louis Latour, Albert Noblet and others were active and worked with the Cercle Celtique of Redon in collecting and stimulating the performance of traditional song and dance.

The idea of the “fest noz” as an event for dancing would take off in the late 1950s and 60s and Cercles Celtiques would organize a fest noz or bal breton where dances of those areas would be featured and traditions of Breton language and French language songs – depending on the area – would be encouraged. In some cases dances and song still alive and well in a particular

area would find new and wider popularity, while in other areas abandoned traditions might be given new life.

By the 1970s the fest noz had become a craze, and joining singers and the paired bombarde-biniou would be instrumental groups of all kinds. And the fest noz had become so popular that it was used by any number of organizations as a fund-raising activity. Numerous Breton newspaper and magazine articles in the early to mid 1970s speak of the “uncontrolled proliferation” of the fest noz. While it had clearly become “of the people,” “the people” did not always learn the dances very well and young people from the city seemed to run rough-shod over the traditions of small rural towns – youths acting and dancing “*n’importe quoi*.” The role of the fest noz as a money-maker for any old cause was particularly troublesome to some who did not feel that Breton culture should be used to raise money for Algerian War veterans, a political party, or the local soccer or swim club - especially when such a fest noz competed for attendance with another raising money for a “Breton” cause (Diwan schools or a Breton cultural organization) or a “just cause” (support for the families of workers who had been laid off). Were young people of Brittany becoming consumers of this new fest-noz rather than participants in a living culture? Would the attraction to tourists seeking “authentic” Breton dancing ruin this event where a sense of community was an important element? The “community” was changing as Brittany became more and more urban. And it was a diverse Breton community that claimed the fest noz as its own. Coming together in dance was not always easy.

I had the opportunity to attend a number of festoù-noz during the summer of 1975 and especially during a year I spent in Brittany from September 1978 to September 1979. The 1970s was a period when Bretons were posing a lot of questions about the authenticity of the fest noz and festivals and about what were perceived as good and bad directions in the evolution of Breton music.

I kept a journal during my time in Brittany, and as a graduate student in Anthropology/Ethnomusicology preparing a thesis on Breton identity and its expression in music and language use, I was practicing a research technique called “participant observation.” When it came to language, my participation in mastering the Breton language was sadly lacking. And it took a while to become reasonably fluent in French. When it came to music and dance, the participation side clearly outweighed my observation abilities most of the time, and my journal entries were often jotted down days after an event. I certainly never took any notes during a fest noz!.

Although not very useful in their lack of good detail, my journal notes (and memories) show that festoù noz in Brittany in the mid to late 1970s were quite varied. They were often dominated by dancers in their 20s (with very few younger teens or older people), although you sometimes found a better mix of ages in some of the smaller towns. In the larger cities like Quimper and Rennes, there was little uniformity in the dancing and a lot of people doing “*n’importe qui*” (“whatever”). But even at smaller festoù noz in rural areas there was not often a great deal of consensus in the dance steps. Like me, many younger Bretons were learning the dances by simply joining in. Some had a better sense of rhythm and understanding of the music than others (I was a pretty good dancer, but there were some dances like the *fisel* that remained beyond my abilities). In some cases people brought different styles (say, for the *gavotte*) to whatever fest noz they attended and kept with their own style – whether it was handed down traditionally to them in their village or learned in a Cercle Celtique dance group – with no attempt to find uniformity or to respect the sometimes subtle differences in style of the “home town” where the fest noz was being held.

My journals note a significant number of inebriated people at the festoù noz I attended. This did not always interfere with their ability to dance, but did sometimes lead to fights towards the close of a fest noz. Drinking with friends was and remains a social element of the fest noz; but drunkenness certainly does not enhance any fest noz. I remember well one instance where a bombarde and biniou pair playing at a fest noz had a few too many drinks. This was forgiven, but they played badly. When no one danced, they stalked off the stage and they were quite angry by this snub from the dancers.

In another example of how important the link between musicians and dancers is at a fest noz, I have a clear memory of an instance where musicians were ousted from the stage. This was in Redon in October 1978 at the large fest noz during the Bogue d’Or festival where dancers were having difficulty identifying which dance a Celtic-electro-folk group was performing (dances were rarely announced, but everyone knew what they were from the rhythm of the opening bars). There were several distinctly different dances going on and those not dancing were clearly confused as to what they should do. At one point traditional singers from the local area took to the stage at the opposite end of the large hall and the Celtic-electro-folk group found themselves being pretty much ignored as dancers joyfully gravitated to the singing (and the dance traditional to the area).

While the fest noz revival in the 1950s focused on the dances of central western Brittany like the *gavotte*, *plinn* and *fisel* for which *kan ha diskan* singing was done,

these were by no means the only dances to benefit from a revived interest in traditions in the post-war period. In eastern as well as western Brittany, dances had continued to be a part of festive events where people gathered. Creating “new” events like a fest noz and organizing new contests and festivals for Breton music (not new in and of themselves) meant that there were more and more opportunities for people to dance, and for traditional and newly composed song and instrumental music to be performed for dancing.

In the 1970s younger people were being introduced (or re-introduced) to music that had become unfashionable in earlier decades, but had not disappeared. It was in St. Vincent-sur-Oust, just outside of Redon, that I also learned how vibrant dances in eastern Brittany had remained at a festival for this dance named for its native town – the Rond de St. Vincent-sur-Oust. It was interesting to see how dancers of all generations from different neighborhoods in this small town took pride in the particular “style” they gave to the Rond. The Rond de St. Vincent has become quite popular at festoù noz throughout Brittany in more recent years, but musicians often miss entirely the particular swing that the people of St. Vincent-sur-Oust give to this unique dance. And with that comment I sound like many critics of the fest noz who continue to complain about how music and dances have been compromised in quality when they become widely popular and leave their “home turf.”

A number of the festoù noz I attended in the 1970s were part of larger festivals or contests like the Bogue d’Or in Redon and Kan ar Bobl in Pontivy. Often, the eliminatory contests held in smaller villages included a fest noz at the end of the day, which focused on the traditions of that particular area and attracted few outsiders. I went to a few of the eliminatory contests for the Bogue d’Or in the fall of 1978 and to the Kan ar Bobl eliminatory contests and festoù noz in Plounevez du Faou and Plounevez Lochrist in the winter of 1979. During my time in Brittany in the 1970s I would also go to festoù noz in Rieux, Plouyé, Plouguerneau, Poullaouen, St. Herbot (as part of the annual Pardon), and in Commana (which was to benefit conscientious objectors) as well as a number of other ones following a concert or embedded in festivals like the Fêtes de Cornouaille or the Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient.

A few of the festoù noz I attended resembled the “ideal” fest noz where a community danced their local dance (nearly exclusively) with great unity. Others were a mix of dances with a mix of disparate steps and arm movements within any given dance. Very often there was a focus on local dances with just a few more “exotic” ones from other parts of Brittany. Most festoù-noz included singers, sonneurs de couple (bombarde & biniou), accordion players (especially in Gallo Brittany), and an array of groups of all kinds. At that period the

Diaouled ar Menez were hot. So were the Morvan Brothers and the Goadec Sisters – masters of kan ha diskant singing.

Despite the dire predictions of the 1970s, the fest noz has remained the expression of a community where the unique music and dances of Brittany continue to thrive – old song texts and tunes as well as dance steps are still being shared by young and old dancing together. I have only had the chance to attend a few festoù noz (or deiz) in the 1980s, 90s or 2000s, but do recall encountering a newer phenomenon in one of my more recent trips in this new century: the “running gavotte.” I was with a Breton friend (with whom I had gone to quite a festoù-noz during my 1970s stay). We arrived at the fest noz well in progress and he sized up the dancers. It was a very large room and a gavotte was in full swing. We joined a line snaking past and it wasn’t long before the dancers switched from the more stately steps to a run – literally – where the rhythm remained fully intact but you covered a much longer distance with each step – an exuberant leaping of sorts. After a while this spurt of energy would ebb back to the more “normal” smaller steps. My friend had spotted the younger dancers in this line and knew that the odds were good that we would take off running. I was clueless at the time and wished I had better shoes, but found the “running” thoroughly enjoyable. The “circle circassien” was another surprise of my later trips back to Brittany. While this dance was fun (similar to American square dancing and Irish couple dances), it seemed a bit too alien to Breton styles to be so widely adopted as a standard fest noz dance. Maybe in 50 years young Bretons will have no idea that it was not handed down from ancestors of past centuries.

I have followed the evolution of the fest noz and other musical events in Brittany through articles and notes in Breton magazines (*Musique Bretonne*, *Ar Soner*, *Armor*, *Ar Men* ... and others) and via internet sites. It is clear that those who go to festoù noz in Brittany are participants, and while there may be a few tourists standing to the side wishing they knew how to dance, the fest noz is not for spectators. It is not impossible to find a fest noz where the particular dance of a certain region is all that you will dance, but more people than ever in Brittany are aware of the many different nuances of the dances traditional to Brittany and workshops are plentiful for those who want to perfect their technique and understanding of dance styles. Interestingly enough, older Bretons who may take pride in the style of dance they grew up with in their local area, often also take delight in learning new dances from elsewhere in Brittany. You will see plenty of younger teens at a fest noz today, but it is not just for young people. The fest deiz, however, is more likely to attract seniors who may not enjoy staying up until the

wee hours of the morning, and families who bring young children.

Since its boom in the 1970s the fest noz has also continued to be used as a fund-raising event – very often for the Diwan schools or other Breton cultural projects, but also for a number of other charitable causes. The “new” fest noz spawned in the mid 1950s was a public event, with an admission fee. The admission money and the profit from the bar and any food sales paid for the singers and musicians, rental of a space and sound equipment, and if there was any left over, it went to whatever group organized the fest noz. This “commercial” side to the fest noz has not seemed to have had a negative impact on the nature of this event or the dance or music it fosters.

So what is a fest noz today? A fest noz is a gathering where people join together – of all ages, family, neighbors, people from anywhere in Brittany, and often a few foreigners – to dance together as a community. And the music – whether it be ancient or newly composed, the unique sound of unaccompanied response style song for dancing, the paired biniou and bombarde, or any combination of electric and acoustic instruments from anywhere in the world – is distinctively Breton. The rhythm and the swing of the dances – which look deceptively simple – are unique. And this is true for the western areas of Brittany where song is in the Breton language as well as for the eastern Gallo areas where French has been the traditional language for singing.

The fest noz continues to serve as an event where older masters have a role to play in inspiring a younger generation, and where musicians can experiment with new compositions and arrangements. The fest noz is an event that truly fosters the performance of traditional Breton music and its transmission. The fest noz is still an integral part of almost every festival and music contest in Brittany and it is very often a celebratory event when a musician, singer or group reaches a key anniversary. For example, on October 9th a fest deiz and fest noz gathering the best of Breton traditional singers and musicians was held to pay homage to Marcel Le Guilloux, a singer and teacher who has impacted several generations of Bretons. And, on November 20th a similar gathering of musicians and singers paid homage to another great traditional singer, Louise Ebreil.

The fest noz is not an aerobic workout where you go to join others in exotic dance, but the occasion to join others in conversations for part of the long night – usually with a glass of something in one’s hand. It’s a place to meet up with old friends and to become acquainted with some new ones. It is a place where

something uniquely Breton happens as a community celebrates tradition and its ongoing evolution.

A few sources of information about the re-invention of the fest-noz:

Pierre-Jakez Hélias, “La tradition des festoù-noz,” *Les lettres française*, Déc. 24-30, 1954

“Distraction très modern ... ou anachronisme – la danse bretonne et les festoù-noz,” *Bretagne Dimanche*, juin 3, 1967
“Kenvreuriez ar festoù-noz,” *Ar Soner* 209, nov.-dec.-jan, 1973-74.

Viviane Coarer, “A propos des festoù-noz” *Breiz* 189, mars 1974, p. 12

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Setting the Scene - Reflections from an Earlier Period by Polig Monjarret

The reinvention of the fest noz did not take place in a vacuum. The following article written 37 years ago serves to remind us that we cannot take the bounty of music and dance in Brittany today for granted. Despite great odds against it, the Breton culture underwent a renaissance in the post-war period, guided by Bretons who carefully tip-toed through a political minefield. They recognized – despite all that was being taught in the schools to children about the merit of being exclusively French – that Brittany had a rich and unique culture. And they succeeded in inspiring others to build paths and to dig up the mines so that this culture could be transmitted and enjoyed by future generations. There were many people involved in this work. Loeiz Ropars and Albert Trevidic cited above were among them, as was Polig Monjarret who was a major player in the renaissance of piping in Brittany. While some may feel that he over-estimates the role of the Bodadeg ar Sonerion (B.A.S.) in the post-war transformation of Breton identity, the following article gives a flavor for the challenges of that period and of the growth in Breton

pride in the 1960s and 70s that is taken for granted today. When Polig Monjarret published this article in 1973 Bretons who had been at work for several decades to build a cultural bridge from older generations to young people were just beginning to really see the fruits of their hard labor.

My apologies for any misinterpretations in translation from the original French text. Underlining and capitol letters have been kept as originally written. I have placed an asterisk * next to a few words and names that might need explanation. – Lois Kuter

“Une nouvelle jeunesse bretonne” Ar Soner 207 (June-July 1973).

Polig Monjarret

It is an uncontested fact that Breton youth today in the vast majority possess an ethnic consciousness and pride, qualities lacking in previous generations.

An ethnic consciousness and pride, but also a will to change life in Brittany.

For those who have been active in the Breton Movement, this gives satisfaction and comfort. They can thus see that they did not expend their efforts in vain. They certainly experienced the scorn and vengefulness of a fatalistic and psychologically burdened population, always ready to fight against its own best interests and to defend the haziest theories as long as they came from the “thinkers” along the shores of the Seine [Paris].

Yes, something has changed in Brittany!

How could that happen? How could that happen when everything seemed definitely lost in the post-war period, when a feeling of Bretonness was practically annihilated? Yet, here it is, stronger than it has ever been and more solidly anchored and so firmly anchored that nothing will ever break it.

It will be part of the history written by a generation yet to be born who analyze the causes of this renaissance of the Breton spirit. They can take the necessary step back to objectivity look at the whole picture that militants still working today would not know how to research or discover.

Nevertheless one can here and now attribute these results, for the most part, to the action of the post-war Cultural Movement. This does not mean that they alone should be credited with this. To the contrary, I feel that it was the incessant and numerous sacrifices made for over a century for the cause of Brittany that led to this. This cultural action is based in an old context leading

from St.-Aubin-du-Cormier*. Its principle merit has been to adapt to imposed circumstances and to know how to reap the maximum of profits for Brittany.

Pursuing Breton action seemed impossible in 1944-1945. All the leaders of the EMSAV*, from political leaders to grammarians, from folklorists to journalists, from writers to economists, were in flight or in prison – condemned to death or forced labor, or to a prison term, or at best forbidden to reside in Brittany ever again and condemned to what was called “national indignity” and the confiscation of their property.

It was yet more serious: everything that was Breton was suspected of “autonomism” and thus “collaboration” with the Germans.

The few advantages [for Breton culture] wrested from the Vichy Government, were abolished: the Consultative Committee of Brittany and the Carcopino Law of 1941 on teaching Breton and the history of Brittany in the schools.

The few rare militants who escaped from the post-war purge were conscious that this anti-Breton atmosphere would precipitate a process of de-Bretonnisation, and thus the assimilation of Bretons into the Hexagon.*

Confusing citizenship with nationality, more than 99% of Bretons declared themselves and wanted to be French first. From this fact, the only Breton activities tolerated were “folklore,” with the defense of the Breton language only on condition that this was circumscribed with carefully considered limits.

To defend Brittany, these rare militants had at their disposal arms with a very weak impact in contrast to the arsenal and innumerable means at the disposal of the Power [French government], and in considering the climate of hostility.

As Marc le Berre said one day, “They had cannons; we had but a sling-shot.” This is just one picture, but one which defines well the situation of the EMSAV in 1944-1945.

What did the EMSAV represent in fact? Some fifteen Celtic Circles of which several saw their role only as a pleasant way to pass time - chided as “matrimonial agencies” by politically active militants. There was also the B.A.S. [Bodadeg are Sonerion] rebuilt in January 1946 with some 50 members of the 105 it had in June 1944. And finally the Bleun Brug (very suspect due to the fact that its founder the Abbé Perrot had been assassinated December 12, 1943), and Ar Falz; but their activities had been reduced to their simplest form. Few things existed in the way of publications: *An Avel* first of all which disappeared very quickly, then *Tir na*

Nog, then *Al Liamm*, which soon became *Al Liamm-Tir-na-Nog*.

The B.A.S. played a considerable role in this work for a Breton renaissance. It must be known that it experienced more difficulty countering the after-effects of 50 years of the Breton Movement than it did in making its own position known.

It's not easy or pleasant to talk about oneself or one's own action. I believe nevertheless that that moment has come, in this 30th anniversary year [of the B.A.S.] to take account of its action.

The B.A.S. was born in October 1942 in an air of enthusiasm which made up 80% of its activity! Dismantled in June 1944, like the whole of the Breton Movement, it was reconstituted in December 1945 and January 1946, but this time with a broader goal: certainly to preserve Breton music, but also to participate in saving Brittany.

The B.A.S. of the year 1946 was made up of about one hundred young people. Dorig Le Voyer spent his time searching for wood and leather to fabricate instruments (a delay of six months to a year for delivery!). Robert Marie kept the books – very modest accounts. Pierre le Fourn and myself did the rest, including first of all to cultivate the “B.A.S. spirit,” organize summer camps, meetings here and there, and to maintain contracts with the few Celtic Circles of the period gathered in the Federation over which Xavier de Langlais presided.

The impetus that I gave to the B.A.S., and which would mark it for several years, was inspired by six months of meditation in the jails of the French State (from June to November 1945).

I was convinced that the failures of the EMSAV were due to the existence of an unfavorable climate for any progression for Brittany. In less than a century (since Jules Ferry and obligatory schooling) the Power had managed to make Bretons ashamed of their own Breton being. In their thinking, one had to throw all that out to become entirely French. For them French citizenship and Breton nationality were incompatible.

I had a firmly anchored feeling that we Bretons were different from the get-go and that we would remain so. We were Breton at Ballon in 848, in St.-Aubin-du-Cormier in 1488, at the Treaty of Union in 1532, on the night of August 4, and ever since under the Monarchies, Empires, and Republics. And, as long as we remained so, we could not be assimilated.

I also had the conviction that the generation of Bretons that held the highest ranks in Brittany was irrecoverable, and hope to improve them was in vain.

The best that one could hope was that they would tolerate the action that was strictly cultural and apolitical that we intended to pursue in the interest of young generations.

This action was most often favored by the older EMSAV militants (discretely, certainly), but others never went beyond masquerades (folklore fêtes), the “termaji.” and they never encountered the absolute interdiction thrown on any form of politics within these associations.

This political and confessional neutrality was thus the only guarantee of success: to rid all Breton activity of any confusion with this was to allow anyone, whatever their tendency or origins, to be comfortable.

I said earlier that the first work of the B.A.S. was to fight against the after-effects of the Breton Movement.

For a half-century, in fact, this Movement had adopted a form of action that most often went counter to its goals. In music, for example, it had neglected everything that was Breton to the benefit of things imported from the Celtic countries. One got to the point of singing only songs from Wales, Scotland, or Ireland, using texts in Breton, surely, which often were of poetic merit, but which the Breton people on the whole (with the Léon region the exception) did not recognize as its own. The first pipers of the B.A.S., and I too I admit, were particularly taken with these same melodies.

It took us over ten years, from 1943 to 1953, to make people see that there was Breton music of a much superior quality, and which had the primary merit of being Breton!

I cite there just one example, but it suffices to reveal the monumental error thus made during a half-century. The authors of these texts adapted to Celtic, German, Flemish, or even English or American tunes, unconsciously persuaded the Breton people that their own music was not worth anything. They contributed to the destruction of the Breton way that had existed before them.

The great majority of the dances practiced by the Celtic Circles which were transmitted from one group to another with more and more distortion to the original dance steps and movement were baptized with fancy names, ridding them of any suspect identity.

I can affirm that 80% of the programs given by Circles and pipers during the years from 1940 to 1950 had nothing Breton to them; the Breton people could recognize nothing of themselves in them, found nothing in them that belonged to them. And I am not talking about the fanciful costumes that were worn, with

Bigouden and Glazik mixed on the same wearer, as you could still see at the Fêtes do Cornouaille in 1949!

I can attest also that this reversal in spirit is at the origin of an awakening of a Breton consciousness among the youth today who cannot imagine the patience it has taken to bring it about.

What has been true for music, dance or costume, has also been true in other areas – political nationalism most notably where a climate of hate had been created against the French in general, accusing them of being responsible for restricting Brittany, whereas most of the other regions of France suffered from the same wrong: the Jacobin centralizing system. Or they would compare the Breton problem to that in Ireland and be inspired by the choices and methods made there to resolve things!

Not only were the defensive arms to which I have alluded of only weak impact, but the ammunition left to us was not adapted to them. It was necessary to make others, true ones that no one could put into doubt.

It would take a long time to explain in detail and to put into context the action of the B.A.S. in this area. I think it suffices to say that it arrived at its ends, but it should be added, not without adversity. No doubt, the principle merit [of the B.A.S.] was to put forward programs that were exclusively Breton, itself or in collaboration with others. The effective collaboration with a good number of Festival Committees is important - first of all, the Fêtes de Cornouaille, and later the Festival des Cornemuses in Brest [forerunner of the Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient].

The creation of the Bagad, after an unsuccessful attempt in 1943 with the Patronage Charles de Blois in Gumgamp and a successful one with the 71e R.I. de Dinan in 1947, would overturn the established situation for the folklore festivals and for the B.A.S. which would no longer be alone in its recruitment.

From 1948 on, one witnessed in fact a return of Breton activities in other areas. A renaissance of the old organization Bleun Brug would take place in Locronan in 1948. Ar Falz would reaffirm itself as a movement in defense of the language. The Celtic Circles and Bagadoù would multiply by 10 to 30 each year until 1960; several would be created or die each month.

The technical framework and direction of the federations and associations [Amicales] of Celtic Circles were overwhelmed by these developments. Local directors most often had only their good will as cultural baggage.

The need to dam the flood was already being felt in 1947. In 1949 it was an obligation. It took three years of

patient efforts on the part of Pierre Le Fourn and myself, of numerous personal mediations which were not always successful, to lead the whole of the associations and affiliated organizations to unite in order to construct a solid structure.

Nevertheless, on October 15 1950, they assembled in Quimper and founded the Confederation Kendalc'h.* This was composed of five specialized movements: Bleun-Brug, Ar Falz, B.A.S., Comité de Fêtes de Cornouaille, and C.E.A.F. (Comité d'Études et d'Action Folklorique en Finistère, part of the department's office of tourism). The near totality of the Celtic Circles and choral groups, which for the most part were already grouped in "Amicales," also agreed to be a part.

At its origin Kendalc'h resembled a "Spanish Inn" – each found only what they brought there! It was a matter thus of giving it a unifying spirit and especially to put some order into the chaos presented in the folklore movement.

To my functions of General Secretary of B.A.S. were added those of Secretary General of Kendalc'h. The least I can say, twenty years later, is that this addition was not to the benefit of the B.A.S. More often than not I had to sacrifice those interests to more general needs. *Ar Soner*, launched by B.A.S. in 1949, became the official magazine of Kendalc'h, of B.A.S. and a more or less phantom organization A.B.R.I., (Association Bretonne des Relations Interceltiques) created uniquely to obtain a subvention for an Inter-Celtic Congress held in Quimper in 1950. The B.A.S. workshops were abandoned. The first of these had been in Gouézec in September 1943, with regular ones afterwards in Argol 1946, Sarzeau 1947 and 1948, Fouesnant 1949, Quimper 1950, and Pont l'Abbé 1951.

But if the B.A.S. lost a few feathers – and it paid 90-95% of the costs of *Ar Soner* – its sacrifices were nevertheless of benefit to Brittany. If one wants to recognize it or not, it was B.A.S. that was the locomotive for Kendalc'h during the years of its founding. It was its influence that guided the early action and which in particular put some order to the chaos that existed among the Celtic Circles and the Amicales (where "ami" only rarely had that sense).

Kendalc'h put into place the projects established since 1947 by Pierre le Fourn and me. It organized, set guidelines, and acted to instill the desire for a constant improvement in the groups and festivals. It managed also in several years to impose a minimum of discipline and to give a taste for order which would bring happy results down the road.

The influence of B.A.S. would show especially in an increase in the contact between the members of groups

and the Breton people. I am strongly convinced that it is there that the serious work began, the consequences of which we can see today.

In studying the dances, songs, music, language, life and costumes of the Breton people the leaders of these groups discovered a people of whom they were a part, but whom they nevertheless had ignored. They were stupefied to discover alive a rich and immense cultural patrimony which comprised a whole art of living, an authentic civilization, totally different than that imposed by the Napoleonic system.

They learned thus to be conscious of themselves as Bretons. In their turn, they taught tens of thousands of young people who were part of their groups the teachings they had acquired through long research.

That was the point of depart for this reclaiming of consciousness on the part of the Breton youth today.

From 1950 on, one witnessed thus the renaissance of the Breton Movement. One after another, wheels were put in place. The C.E.L.I.B.* was founded in 1951. In 1953 it was Emgleo-Breiz. Later, Kuzul ar Brezhoneg, the Kamp ar Vrezhonegerien, Al Leur Nevez, S.A.F.E.V., etc. Several magazines were begun: *Skol Vreiz*, *Brud*, *Barr-Heol*, *Skol*, *Breiz*, which added to older ones: *Al Liamm*, *Ar Soner*, *Ar Falz*, *Bleun-Brug*, *Sked*, *La Vie Bretonne* (which led to *Peuple Breton* before the C.E.L.I.B.) etc. Numerous mimeographed bulletins were launched here and there, some good enough to endure.

To this cultural "arsenal" were added magazines with a political character: *Ar Vro*, *Jeune Bretagne*, *L'Avenir de la Bretagne*, *Le Peuple Breton*, to cite just a few of the more important ones.

Everyone was aware that the EMSAV was in a period of rebirth. Less than fifteen years after its destruction, the Breton Movement was little by little reconstituted in all its different lines and of every tendency.

The merit of B.A.S. in all of this was to have stimulated a favorable climate for the development of these ideas. It actively participated in the reclaiming of a wasteland – even a hostile land - in which only imported seeds had been sown, and thus permitted national sowing to take root and proliferate.

Other movements in their turn created other projects which today grow from the actions of the post-war period. The creation of the Fest-Noz, notably, contributed enormously to give Breton speakers pride in the language once again. As with all intelligent ideas, that one was accepted by all; the fest-noz continues to complete successfully with professional dance bands.

In the area of language and its teaching the époque of suppressed hope is over. One only has to read the resolutions adopted recently in Pontivy and Rennes by Emgleo Breiz, Kuzul ar Brezhoneg and Skol an Emsav, as well as by the new Cultural Commission of C.E.L.I.B. to be convinced.

For several years, after Glenmor and after Alan Stivell, to cite just the best known, one has seen the birth of a new form of song: the Breton "folk-song." These singers with a militant repertoire condemn social injustice and the pitiful lot left to Bretons [by France] in a new musical style. They also idealize a Brittany that is always beautiful, more human, and better for the men and women that live there. They have their "fans," young and less young. Their records sell by the thousands and the best of them are popular in juke-boxes.

Right now every new form of Breton expression is assured of success. I cite as proof the Diaouled ar Menez, the first Breton "Ceili-band," or the concerts of bombard and organ by Jean-Claude Jégat and Louis lhuel. Ten thousand copies of their 30 cm record were sold in six months.

Those are the unmistakable signs. The Breton spirit is not the exclusive property of a handful of insiders or only found in the specific groups of the EMSAV, but IT IS OF THE PEOPLE, and that is what gives me all the hopefulness.

Yes, that is the result of the action of the Cultural Movement, and the B.A.S. made a powerful contribution to that.

It is also necessary to recognize that the Power (involuntarily) helped. In placing a taboo on everything that was not "cultural," it led all the militants to focus on this matter. And one must say, that the Breton Movement would never have gained the Breton People to its own cause if it had linked its action in the beginning to any activity suspected to be political in any way.

It is also true that this undertaking would not have, in and of itself, succeeded in leading tens of thousands of young people to feel and declare themselves Breton "Penn kil ha troad." The development for most people of secondary studies to the baccalaureate (and isn't Finistère the department with the highest scholarship in France?) and advanced studies have played a considerable role. In opening people's thinking to a larger way of looking at things, these studies have permitted students to analyze the imbalance in what is given to Brittany. This has naturally led them to fight against the under-development that Brittany has chronically suffered and, in consequence, to oppose the

Power which is responsible for this because of the centralized system it imposes.

Only this Power does not seem to be conscious of this. It is thus a fact that the action of the Cultural Movement started to bear fruit the day when thousands of Bretons entered the universities, and then, armed with diplomas, entered the working world.

That's an irreversible situation. Nothing should impede the pursuit of this re-Bretonization of spirits leading logically to an active fight: The cultural and economic decolonization of Brittany and a reversal of the alienation of this people.

The form of the regionalization thought out in Paris is not what is important. What counts is that Brittany wants to remain Breton. The rest will follow. Or it will be taken.

A few notes from the Editor:

St.-Aubin-du-Cormier – A battle on July 28, 1488, where 6,000 Bretons lost their lives in defense of Breton independence against the French.

EMSAV – Breton for “uprising,” this refers to the Breton Movement as a whole – all those working for Breton language, culture, economy, political status, etc. Not used a much today, you will find this more often in earlier writings.

Hexagon – the hexagon refers to France and in particular a rigid idea of a France with six equal sides to its geographical borders (with Paris as a focal point).

Kendalc'h – B.A.S. would break away from this organization at a later date, as would a number of Celtic Circles. Kendalc'h has continued to serve as a federation primarily of Cercles Celtiques, and has been a strong advocate for Breton language and culture. See Bro Nevez 114 (May 2010) for information about its 60th anniversary celebrations.

C.E.L.I.B. – Comité d'Étude et de Liaison des Intérêts Bretons. This was founded in 1950 by Joseph Martray to coordinate economic interests of Brittany and to serve as a unified front in working with the French government. It would remain very active until 1964 in influencing French regional policies until fading in the 1970s.



Bagad New York Celebrates its first anniversary

This November 20, 2010, the Bagad New York celebrated its first

anniversary with a Fest Noz at the Hungarian House (218 E 82nd Street, New York City). Doors opened at 7 and dance classes were held at 8 to prepare celebrants for the fest noz that went from 9 to midnight. There is an entry fee of \$20 to support the bagad in the purchase of instruments and training.

It is pretty rare that a fest noz is held in the United States (although the organization BZH New York has had some great ones). It is even rarer that one finds a bagad in the U.S. I have heard of a few Cercle Celtiques organized in Breton communities in American cities in past decades, but this appears to be the very first bagad to be created here. And this is primarily thanks to the efforts of Yoann Le Goff, a piper originally from Landerneau, who moved to Stamford, Connecticut about four years ago. In his efforts to join a pipe band here he encountered American musicians who were excited about the idea of learning to perform Breton music.

The website of the Bagad New York (www.bagad.us) doesn't give a precise idea of the size or membership of this band, but it is an open-ended group which attracts those with some experience as pipers or drummers in Scottish and Irish pipe bands (Scottish pipe bands especially are very widely found in the U.S.). Finding pipers and drummers interested in learning Breton tunes and rhythms has not been nearly as challenging as finding musicians ready to work on mastering the bombarde. A great deal of work has been done through virtual lessons via the internet, and then there are the pipers and drummers who have traveled to Brittany to courageously join a bagad (Bagad Bro Kemperle and Kerlenn Pondi) in Brittany for some experience in competitions there. Here's how they describe this on the Bagad New York website:

In what is fast becoming an annual event for some Eastern-US based Celtic musicians, five individuals traveled to Brittany in order to compete in the "Championnat National des Bagadou" for the first category, held February 14th at "Le Quartz" in Brest. The trip, lasting from February 4th to February 15th, reflects a sustained and growing American interest in the music of Brittany, as this marks not only the second year that such a trip was taken, but also an expansion in the number of musicians making the trip. The trip also served a dual purpose in allowing the musicians, who are also involved in the founding of the fledgling Bagad New York, to join some of the finest Bagadou in Brittany in the height of competition – a vital learning experience.

This travel to Brittany has been facilitated by Yoann Le Goff whose bagad connections have opened doors. But the Americans have had to prove their stuff in working with some of the top Breton bagadou. Crossing the

Atlantic to go to Brittany for some immersion lessons, and inviting Breton teachers to come to America to conduct workshops are key in the development of the bagad given the fact that few Breton musicians have made their home here. Yoann has been joined in his work with the bagad by Samuel Frère, a native of Guingamp, who is a post doctorate student at Columbia University in New York City. Samuel teaches Breton dance for BZH-New York and has been singing traditional Breton dance songs with Yoann. But, the Americans who are part of the Bagad New York bring with them years of devotion to Breton music – primarily as listeners. They are talented musicians who have taught themselves tunes and joined in any Breton dancing they could find on this side of the Atlantic. They do not all live in New York, so their travel from a distance for practice sessions is definitely a labor of love.

The Bagad New York has some good years ahead of it. It has the very important aim of having fun, but its members are very concerned about the quality of the music they perform and have as a mission to help Americans become more aware of the wealth of Breton tradition. And, they hope that more Americans will learn to play Breton music.

Check out their website to learn more: www.bagad.us.

Losses for the Breton Language and Music

Martial Pézenec (1933-2010)

This September Brittany lost a hero in the support of Breton culture and especially the bagad, Martial Pézenec. When I had the privilege of attending the Cultural Institute of Brittany's ceremony to induct new members into the Order of the Ermine in 2007 I had to opportunity to briefly meet this honoree, whose name was very familiar to me from years of reading *Ar Soner*, the magazine of the Bodadeg ar Sonerion (BAS). There were so many well-wishers surrounding Martial Pézenec that it was not possible to do more than give one's congratulations, but clearly he merited becoming a part of the Order of the Ermine for his life-long work for Brittany.

As you read in Polig Monjarret's article from 1973, the BAS was founded in 1942 to support the renaissance of Breton piping traditions. This was also a period when the Cercle Celtique was a center for Breton cultural action, and Martial Pézenec joined the Celtic Circle of Glomel in 1946 and then became a piper with the Kevrenn Rostrenen in 1948. He was a co-founder of the Celtic Circle of the Abbaye de Langonnet in 1952 and in 1953 began piping with the Celtic Circle of Rennes and the Kevrenn Roazhon. He was a co-founder with Jean-

Yves Roche of Yaouankiz Breizh, a bagad for children that would become the Bagad Kadoudal.

In 1962 he became part of the directing group for the Bodadeg ar Sonerion and would succeed Polig Monjarret in 1982 as its leader for nine years. With Sam Le Poupon of Langonnet he won the championship of Brittany for paired "sonneurs de couple" in 1963, as well as some other competitive victories in Quimper during the early 1960s.

In 1967 he created the Imprimerie Centre-Bretagne, a printing company in Rostrenen, and served as the founding president of the Central-Western Brittany economic exposition – thus supporting economic as well as cultural development in Brittany. He also was the president of the twinning committee for Rostrenen with Kanturk in Ireland and he served as adjunct mayor for Rostrenen since 1983.

In 1986 he would take on the presidency of the Amzer Nevez cultural center near Lorient for 13 years before becoming its honorary president.

While not the most visible of the *sonneurs* active in the renaissance of piping in Brittany and the spectacular growth of the bagad, Martial Pézenec was one of the pioneers who must be credited for the musical vitality taken so much for granted in Brittany today.

Charlez Ar Gall (1921-2010)

Early in November Brittany lost a pillar of support for the Breton language. Charlez Ar Gall was born in l'Hôpital-Camfrout in northwestern Brittany (situated between Cornouaille and the Léon regions) and spoke only Breton when he entered school. He would become a teacher in the early 1940s and at this time he would meet his wife, Jeanne-Marie Guillamet, better known as Chanig Ar Gall who would share with him much of his work for the Breton language in the years to follow. In the post war period he would join Ar Falz, first created in 1931, when it was relaunched to promote Breton language and the teaching of Breton history in the public schools. He would also be active with Ar Falz in teaching summer Breton workshops.

Charlez Ar Gall is best known for his pioneering role in the development of radio and television for the Breton language. He would follow Pierre-Jakez Hélias and Per Trépos in 1959 as the radio broadcaster for Breton language programs (30 minutes weekly) for Radio-Quimerc'h and Inter-Bretagne for 17 years. It was Charlez Ar Gall who was the first to do a Breton language television broadcast for a weekly 1 ½ minutes in 1964. By the early 1970s Breton would have 13 weekly television minutes, and by the early 1990s just 90 minutes ... and Charlez Ar Gall was part of the hard

work to slowly build a presence for the Breton language on this media. There is still much to be done but Bretons have continued to show that Breton can be used creatively for television and now internet programming.

Charlez Ar Gall worked for the cause of the Breton language all his life, plunging in during the post war period when there was little popular support and certainly even less governmental support. During this time he was active as a writer with Emgleo Breizh and the journal Brud (now Brud Nevez) as well as Ar Falz, and later worked with TES which publishes materials for Breton language programs in the schools. In 1955 he collaborated with Job Jaffré on a booklet called *Breizh hor bro* which was used widely in bagadoù and Celtic Circles as a basic text to give young people fundamental knowledge about Breton culture and history. Judging from the 5th edition of 1976 I have in my book collection, this was a mini-encyclopedia, presenting history and basic information about all aspects of Brittany and its culture. He would also publish *Toutes le Cultures de Bretagne* with Skol Vreizh (rededicated in 2005). Charlez Ar Gall's strong interest in Breton history is evidenced in his role as a founding member of the Société d'Études de Brest et du Léon and as a member of the Société archéologique du Finistère.

Charlez Ar Gall used all media available to him to promote the Breton language as a contemporary living language to be read and heard on radio and television. He was indeed a pioneer. He and Chanig Ar Gall were both recognized for their life-long work for Brittany in 1990 when they were inducted into the Order of the Ermine.



Heard of, but Not Heard – New Music from Brittany

The following quick notes are drawn primarily from reviews and notes in the following Breton magazines: *Ar Men* 178 (sep-oct 2010), *Armor* 488 (sept 2010), 489 (oct 2010) & 490 (nov 2010) & *Musique Bretonne* 222 (sep-oct 2010).

Amañ Octet. Amañ Octet. D'ici d'ailleurs DIDA 001. A Breton jazz group composed of eight musicians (as the name implies): Jeff Alluin (piano), Xavier Lugué (ctb) Simon Bernier (drums) Benoit Gaudiche (trumpet) Krystian Sarrau (soprano and alto sax) Thomas Laroche (alto sax & bass clarinet) Jacques Ravenel (soprano, tenor and baritone sax) & Olivier Ente (tuba)

Gweltaz Ar Fur. Mebay 'vo glaw. Ar Bed Keltiek ABK01.

In the 1970s Gweltaz Ar Fur was well known as a “chanteur-engagé” – a singer and composer of militant protest songs for Brittany. While this singer continued to perform here and there in the years since, he became better known as the founder of the Ar Bed Keltiek store where you could find anything Breton in the way of books and music. Gweltaz ar Fur was also active in the early days of Diwan (and his children and grand children have been Diwan students). Upon retirement from retail, Gweltaz is back performing and has released this new album of songs – his own original compositions, and a few texts by Breton poets or drawn from the Breton tradition.

Nolwenn Arzel. Are a garan. Vocation Records VOC 1777.

Nolwenn Arzel arranges traditional Breton, Irish and Scottish airs and dances on Celtic harp, adding her own style to familiar and less familiar melodies.

Bagad Karreg an Tan & Alea Jacta Est. Kataje / Live. Production Kataje Asso, Kataje 2010.

Karreg an Tan is an “affiliate” of the Bagad Brieg and Alea Jacta Est is a rock band from Nantes. They combine here for a live performance which combines the sound of the bagad – lots of bagpipes and drums – with a rock band that has a reggae edge. If love both the bagad and the drive of rock music, here the power of both is combined.

Bayati. Foñs ar bed. Coop Breizh

This group which met at Kreiz Breizh Akademi (where east meets west in music) draws from poetry of the Arabic world and Brittany, and of its own composition - in Breton or French. Texts are set to music that is Breton and of a whole different world. The group includes singer Faustine Audebert, Gervant Le Gac (wooden flute), Florian Baron (oud), Gabriel Faure (violin). Gaël Martineau (mazar, derboukha) and Gaëtan Samson (mazar, zarb, riqq).

Roland Becker. Immrama. Oyoun Musik OM 004.

One can expect something interesting from bombard/sax player Roland Becker, and here he arranges traditional themes using harp, bombarde, flute, veuze and various percussion instruments, with the addition of sounds from ringing stones, whistles, and other unusual music-makers. Becker plays with musical sound as well as concepts about music.

Contréo. Contréo. Label Caravan. LC 004

Olliver Leroy is a singer from Rennes who combines here with the Jean-Philippe Goude chamber ensemble in a music described as a combination of Henry Purcell and Philip Glass. With a voice resembling counter-tenors of Baroque music, the performance by Contréo received a lot of notice at the Tombées de Nuit and

Vielles Charrues festivals in Brittany this summer and received a strong review in the magazine *Ar Men*.

François Corneloup Trio. *Noir Lumière*. Innacor. INNA 31003

This trio is composed of François Corneloup (saxophones), Hélène Labarrière (bass fiddle) and Simon Goubert (percussion) who perform in a jazzy style.

Gérard Delahaye. *1000 Chansons*. Dylie Productions DY 310.

With a music and subtle humor that is engaging for adults Gérard Delahaye has specialized in music for children. There's a certain sophistication in the texts that makes them interesting for all ages.

***Identités*.** Coop Breizh CD 1036.

A compilation of Corsican, Basque, Bas-Navarrais and Breton performers in a variety of styles and themes to show off the diverse identities of peoples found in and on the borders of France.

Yann-Fañch Kemener, Laurent Audemard, François Fava, Renat Sette. *Si je savais voler – chants de Bretagne et d'Occitanie*. Buda Musique 3018165.

This is the fruit of a collaboration between Yann-Fañch Kemener, a well-known traditional singer of Brittany who has performed with musicians of a variety of styles and centuries, and Renat Sette, a singer from the Provençal tradition of southern France who, like Kemener, is rooted in the traditions of his home country. They work with two musicians from Languedoc: François Fava, a saxophonist, and Laurent Audemard, a clarinet and oboe player who also arranges much of the music of this performance where Breton and Occitan traditions meet.

Plantec. *Mekanik*. Aztec Musique CM 2279

A well known "fest noz band" of Brittany, Plantec here takes a few more liberties and some qualities of a rock band. But this is still quite Breton in sound with voice, guitar, flute, bombarde and biniou, but also electric bass, percussion and electronic M-kanik beats that make this other than just an ordinary band for dancing at a fest noz.

Ruz. *Sterne*. Self-produced

This is a group made up of Gaël Soulabaille (guitar), Marine Hamon (fiddle), Serge Bouteille (bombardes, flutes), and Morgan Gilet (biniou) who pull from the Breton repertoire and perform their own compositions as well. Breton dances have a contemporary sound, but the melodic lines and rhythms are perfect for dancing or listening.

Gilles Servat. *40 ans de succès*. Label Productions / Wagram 3219842

A celebration of 40 years as a singer and song-writer, this double-CD includes 37 selections - classics by Servat like *La blanche hermine* and a variety of songs that represent the range of this poet. One previously unrecorded song *Erika, Erika* is included as well. A concert DVD is also part of this production which shows why Gilles Servat has remained a favorite for Bretons for so many years.

Startijen. *Kreiz da fas*. Paker Prod.

This is the third CD by this group who include a variety of Breton dances as well as melodies. The five members of the group are Tangi Oillo, Youn Roue, Tangi Ar Gall-Carre, Kaou Gwenn and Konogan An Habask, with invited guest for this CD, bass player Charles Lucas.

Liet International Contest for Songs in Minority Languages

For the first time Brittany, is hosting the Liet International contest for songs in minority languages of Europe. This is the 7th year for this contest which was first developed in the Friesland (Netherlands) by the Liet Foundation in 2002. It has included several Breton groups and individuals – most recently in 2008 when Gwennyn won the audience's popular vote while Corsican Jacques Culioli was awarded first place by the jury. For the November 27 contest held in Lorient, Dom Duff represents Brittany, competing with ten other singers from various European nations. The finalists are selected in a complicated process which combines winners of song contests held in particular countries as well as a more open contest by those who send in songs to an international jury. This year contestants present their original song compositions in Scottish and Irish Gaelic, Faroese, Galician, Vespian (a Finn-Ugrian language in Russia), Asturian, Sámi, Frisian, Corsican and Friulian as well as Breton. The jury for the contest includes a representative from each country represented.

For more information about this song contest see the website: www.liet.nl/en/internationaal/



The U.S. ICDBL at the Potomac Celtic Festival

A report from Susan Baker

The US ICDBL Society Booth welcomed Breizh NY at the 2010

Potomac Celtic Festival. Jacky Fauchaux, Antoinette Blaikie, and Samuel Frere came down from New York to Leesburg, Virginia, to join Susan Baker, Roger Gossement, Jim Garrett, and Dorothy and Ben Pecson at our information booth, and to teach Breton Dances on the dance stage. They brought some wonderful items from BZH-NY to sell to help augment our coffers and our public information, including bookmarks, albums, and photographs. We must have been quite a successful crew, as our booth won the Potomac Celtic Festival Best Society Tent Award for 2010! The Dance workshops were well received by enthusiastic participants; and as usual, seeing the young kids "get" a dance is always a thrill.

Editor's Note: The U.S. ICDBL has been a part of this June weekend festival since its very beginnings and we hope U.S. ICDBL Members will consider joining us at the 2011 festival.



New Books from Brittany

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

Mikael Bodlore-Penlaez. *Atlas des Nations sans Etat en Europe – peuples minoritaires en quête de reconnaissance.* Yoran Embanner. 2010. 159 pages. ISBN 978-2-914855-71-6.

Many people in the United States are aware that Europe is a relatively small continent with a diversity of countries and languages. But it would be a rare American indeed who would not find this book an eye-opening introduction to dozens of previously unknown peoples and languages. To start off this "atlas" the author introduces some basic vocabulary so that you can more easily navigate your way through the complexity of peoples with distinctive identities and feelings of nationality which do not usually match the political borders which define states and citizens. The focus of the book is on "nations without states" – people who feel themselves to be a distinct group (based on language, history, religion, culture and any mix of those) but do not have the status of a State (what English-speakers usually call a "country" like the United States, Canada, or Mexico). Nations may have relative degrees of governance powers, but their geographic territory does not coincide with the borders of a State.

The definition of terms like "minority," "nation," "people," right from the get-go is enormously helpful. This introductory section also discusses the different actions taken by those hoping to achieve various levels of political autonomy and independence. With a focus on language as a key marker in distinguishing peoples of Europe, this initial section of the book also presents the

dozens of different languages found within Europe, with charts and maps.

MAPS !!! This is an atlas, so the over 60 maps you find throughout are invaluable in placing people and languages in a geographic space. Most American readers of Bro Nevez can easily find Brittany and the other Celtic countries on a map, and since we have talked about them from time to time, hopefully you can also place some of the other non-French languages found in France, like Basque, Flemish, Alsatian, Catalan. When it comes to the rest of Europe, few Americans have had the exposure needed to sort out who is where! And I am certain that most Europeans have significant areas of fuzziness when it comes to the diversity of cultures to be found.

The bulk of this atlas is a presentation of the different "nations without states" – each one getting several pages where a sketch of history is given, language(s) are described, basic demographics are given, the political situation is presented, and a map or two is used to clearly present diversity within each area. This is organized by language types and the nations within. The section on Celts includes Brittany, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Cornwall and the Isle of Man. The "Roman" language group includes Galicia, Catalonia, Occitanie, Corsica, Sardinia, Frioul, Romansh, Savoy and Aoste, and the Walloons. The Germanic section includes Alsatia, Frise, Flanders, South Tyrol, and The Faroe Islands. The Slavic nations are the Katsuby and Sorabs. The Basques have a section of their own. Under the Finno-Ugrians you find both the Sames and the Gagauziyans. Since this book is in French, finding a name more familiar to an English speaker can be a challenge and there is no list to help you with translation there. But the book does include the names for peoples and languages in their own language so you will know that the Bretons call Breton "Brezhoneg" and the Sardinians call their language "Sardu."

To reflect the complexity of geography and political borders, other language speakers and minority peoples are arranged in the book in a different way. In a section called *National Minorities and New Claims* you find Swedes in Finland, Germans in Eastern Europe, Hungarians in Rumania and Slovakia and you find the Aromanians dispersed in the Balkans. You also find sections which focus on geographical areas like the Iberian Peninsula, northern Italy, Silesia, Moravia and Scandinavia where the diversity within a geographic area is described. In the section *Ancient Minorities, New States* you find an excellent presentation of changed borders in eastern Europe – the Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Moldavia, Yugoslavia, Kosovo, etc. Again, the maps as well as concise texts are enormously helpful in sorting out who is who.

Throughout the book you will find flags of the nations presented. A bibliography at the end will help direct you to more resources, as will a list of websites including that created by the author: eurominority.eu.

In this atlas, Mikael Bodlore-Penlaez – with the help of a long list of consultants and contributors best able to speak for the peoples presented in the book - has put together an extremely rich resource on the languages and peoples of Europe. It is as clearly and concisely presented as any complex topic can be. There is a wealth of detail, but information is written so that those with the fuzziest notion of Europe will come away with a good understanding of the many peoples and complexity of identity. The photos, graphics, and maps add lots of color to every page, and make it a pleasure to explore and learn about diversity within Europe.



Patrick Malrieu. *Qui veut faire l'ange, fait la bête!* – De la gwerz bretonne de Yann Girin à la légende hagiographique et au mythe ... TIR, Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique, Rennes 2. 2010. ISBN 978-2-917681-09-1. 141 pages.

As a co-founder of Dastum in 1972, and its president for over 20 years, Patrick Malrieu has always had a passion for the music and oral traditions of Brittany. He completed a doctorat thesis in 1998 (Celtic Studies at the Université de Rennes 2) with the title *La chanson populaire de tradition orale en langue bretonne – Contribution à l'établissement d'un catalogue*. So he knows a thing or two about Breton language song and its diversity of themes. Patrick Malrieu has been immersed in Breton song as a scholar but also as one who has worked to promote its performance and transmission as an expression of a living Breton culture.

In this new book, he explores a particular song in the Breton tradition, the ballad of Yann Girin. The gist of the story - told much more eloquently in the very long ballad – is as follows: Yann Girin is living a saintly life and the Devil is frustrated that he cannot seem to lead him astray. So, he disguises himself as a fellow Hermit and draws the daughter of a Count into the drama. She goes to stay with Yann Girin to be cured of illness. The Devil in disguise continues to stir things up and ultimately Yann Girin rapes the girl and is convinced by the Devil to murder her and hide the body. The Devil reveals himself and claims victory. Yann Girin seeks pardon from the Pope but is ordered to return to live in the wild on all fours like an animal, growing the hairy coat of a bear. Seven years later the Count's hunting party captures him. A new-born baby speaks out to

deliver God's pardon to Yann Girin. The Count must also pardon him and they go to retrieve the girl's remains. She is found alive and well thanks to the prayers of the Hermit and the Virgin. A convent is built on the site.

In looking for the origins of this song that entered the Breton oral tradition at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century by means of a written "broadsheet," Malrieu embarks on a journey to several continents and back thousands of years. In analyzing the themes of this song, he examines songs and stories and all the characters akin to Yann Girin found throughout Europe, northern and eastern Africa, the Middle East and India. He finds that the particular motifs of this tale are found in very different societies, cultures and religions through a long period of time. And the basic story line is transmitted through a variety of media – oral and written texts, songs, stories, paintings and sculpture, theater and even a comic-book style of depiction.

Patrick Malrieu would be the first to say that this detailed book comparing different themes and characters – complete with charts and a multitude of references – is not the end of his hard labor. Indeed he invites others to contribute to further exploration of the story. And he asks the reader to look at myths and legends that travel back and forth in an oral and written tradition and through time and space as important media for the expression of humanity's values and ideals. In their unique and creative adaptation by particular communities, myths and legends should not be rejected as merely children's stories, but be enjoyed as a way to understand the world around one.

This book is likely to be of most interest to scholars of song and folklore, and in the depth of the research and clear presentation of a complex weave of themes, characters, and story lines, Patrick Malrieu has made a valuable contribution. The study is structured so that non-scholars will find it enjoyable and those who want all the footnotes can certainly find them. There are a number of illustrations and photos that greatly enhance the reading.



Daniel Giraudon. *Traditions populaires de Bretagne – Du Chêne au Roseau: Folklore des plantes, des fleurs, des buissons et des arbres.* Yoran Embanner. 2010. 357 pages. ISBN 978-2-916579-26-9.

You begin this exploration of the plants, flowers, bushes and trees of Brittany with a poem in Breton by Fañch Peru: "Bleunioù gouez ma bro." This is in defense of

what some consider weeds and others cherish as lovely wild flowers. This leads directly into the first section of the book which describes how children play in and with the natural environment. If you grew up in a rural or semi-rural area you will recognize the dissection of seed pods and plants for the purposes of divination and play, or the making of primitive tools, constructions, or musical instruments from sticks and leaves, or the harvesting of berries and flower nectar. Throughout the book you will discover Breton and Gallo language names and sayings associated with plants and trees as well as stories associated with them. And you will encounter children and adults at play with their natural surroundings. Also found throughout the book are medicinal, magical and practical uses for plants (food and drink – like the all-important cider apple trees - shelter, bedding for animals, etc.)

The author, Daniel Giraudon, has done extensive research of written documentation surrounding the folklore of the natural environment, but this book is also full of accounts from living people in Brittany who share memories of the past and stories of the present. Their photographs are sprinkled throughout the book, as are photos of plants, bushes, trees and places. While the people are always identified, the plants are not. In most cases their identity is clear from the text. Botanists and serious gardeners will have no trouble identifying plants from the photos, and certainly the Bretons who will make up most of the public for this book will already be familiar with the plants depicted. Those with limited French – and this would include tourists or occasional travelers highly unlikely to study the names of flowers and trees - will want to consult a good French-English (or Breton-English) dictionary to find the familiar English-language name – especially for plants that do not grow in your own backyard.

Most sections of the book focus on a particular plant or tree. These include dandelions, nettle, ferns, foxglove, mistletoe, blackberry bushes, holly, nut and fruit trees, and oak, beech, chestnut and boxwood trees, to mention just some. Covering such a wide ground of plants and trees does not leave room for in-depth coverage of the lore and practical use of each particular plant, and this book is not intended to be a scientific treatise on the botany of Brittany. It serves very well as intended to gather lots of interesting lore and practices (magical, medicinal and nutritional) associated with the natural environment of rural Brittany.

People who explore and enjoy the natural world around them – whether that be in Brittany or anywhere else, in a city park or wilder countryside setting – will find something new and of interest in this book. It may be a very familiar saying or practice, or it may be a unique element of Breton life and culture.

Daniel Giraudon has a doctorate in Ethnology and is a professor at the Université de Bretagne Occidentale and a researcher with the Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique in Brest. He writes regularly for the magazine *Ar Men* and has contributed articles in Breton and French to a number of other Breton publications: *Skol Vreizh*, *Al Liamm*, *Musique Bretonne*, *Kreiz*, *Klask*, and *Brud Nevez* ... He has written a number of well researched yet highly readable books on Breton lore and traditions. Here are a few more recent ones which focus on Bretons and their relation to the natural world:

Traditions populaires de Bretagne, Du coq à l'âne.
Editions Chasse-Marée/Ar Men, 2000
Traditions populaires de Bretagne, Du soleil aux étoiles, folklore du ciel. Coop Breizh, 2007.

3 CDs in Breton for Dastum Bro-Dreger's Encyclopédie sonore du Trégor-Goëlo :
Arri eo 'r mestre r gêr – imitations et autres paroles des animaux de la ferme, 2006
Alanig kof ruz – imitations, chants et autres paroles d'oiseaux, 2007
Doup ha doup ha doup – rimes et comptines pour enfants, 2007.

See also the author's website :
<http://danielgiraudon.weekly.com>



Stéphane Brousse, with watercolors by Sandra Lefrançois. *Oiseaux des côtes bretonnes*. Yoran Embanner, 2010. 143 pages. ISBN 978-2-916579-27-6.

This is a truly beautiful book on birds of Brittany intended not for ornithologists but for those who want to explore the coasts of Brittany and learn just a little about birds that they are likely to see. Just 55 birds of hundreds of species are presented here, but that's a great start for the amateur birder or curious hiker.

The book takes you to 13 natural sites – most of which are nature preserves – covering the entire coast of Brittany, starting at the Bay of Mont-Saint-Michel at the northeastern border with Normandy. You then head west with five other stops on the northern coast before landing on the island of Ouessant, the furthest point west of Brittany out in the Atlantic. You then travel to five spots on the southern coast, heading east to end at the Lac de Grand-lieu south of Nantes close to Brittany's border with the Vendée. A map showing the location for each location accompanies a meaty page of information about the site – its natural features and the wealth of flora and fauna to be found.

Once you complete an introduction to your travel stop, you meet a few of its birds. On one page you find a description with names in French and Breton, and sometimes Gallo, and the scientific name. The bird is described – and here a drawing presenting the names of bird body parts found at the front of the book will be very helpful for those who have not developed this more scientific part of their vocabulary. A glossary of terms is also quite helpful. The geographical spread of the bird (sometimes world-wide) and its migration is noted. What it eats, its reproduction cycle, and nest is also described. Finally, its “state of health” is given – endangered, protected by laws, and threats it faces to its future. A quick list of the bird’s features is also included – height and length, weight, longevity, and years for sexual maturity.

For each bird a full page of watercolor sketches is provided – and this alone makes this book a treasure. The paintings capture not only the color of feathers, eyes, and feet, but present the bird as it moves – in flight, standing, walking and running. This sense of movement captures the personality of the bird and allows a much easier identification than the stiff silhouettes found in standard bird guides. The drawings are artistically beautiful and engaging, and definitely practical in giving one a sense of how a bird flaps its wings, turns its head, and opens its mouth.

An alphabetical index to the birds at the end of the book makes it easy to find a particular species that may be found in a number of the sites covered. A bibliography and short list of websites gives readers the opportunity to explore a bit further.

While this book is a practical guide to a few sites along the coasts of Brittany that nature-lovers will want to explore, it is a pleasure for anyone who loves birds and the art of depicting them.



**DEEP INSIDE A BRETON
SKULL 28
A quarrel between two
pieces of bread**

Jean Pierre Le Mat

Sure, you will say that I am joking.

You can be amazed when you listen to whispers in Broceliande Forest. Everyone knows that. If you prick up your ears there, you hear strange things. You hear words of beings who, in other places, stay invisible, dumb and motionless.

This time, you'll say I'm going too far. You will say that to be able to hear what I heard, I must be a pebble, or perhaps a clod. Yes, that is it. A clump of earth near the lake of the ancient forges, where tourists come for a picnic. Maybe.

In any case, I swear that what I heard is absolutely true.

Two pieces of bread, two heels of a loaf, had been thrown there, one beside the other. At first glance, there was no difference between them. Some bread crumb with crust on top of it. But I looked more closely, very closely. And I realized that there was some animation there.

- Let me introduce myself, said the first one with a pretentious voice. I had been brought up in a large field. There were wheat plants as far as the eye could see. I could watch huge machines plowing and sowing. I was picked up by a big green combine harvester. I was stored in an immense grain silo. I lived on a grand scale, you know.

The second heel did not answer immediately. Seemingly, its crumb was less white, its crust harder. The first one stiffened while hearing the intonations of a peasant accent.

- I had been made from wheat growing not far from here, near the village of Trehorenteuc, he said. I grew up in a field bordered by gorse. During the spring I heard the birds singing. I saw rabbits running. Ah, yes, I remember all that ... With my brothers, I laughed with all my heart watching them jumping and playing! I didn't bother.

One day, machines came. They were probably smaller than yours. Above the roar of the engines, I heard men's voices. I felt their strength while the tractor was moving and turning. I was reaped and then laid down on a wood floor. The smell of grass reached me through the slats.

The first one interrupted the Mauron's guy.
- You know, I have been scien-ti-fi-cal-ly formulated. A big tap poured the right amount of water on the flour. The large blades of the kneading trough mixed the dough during a time previously calculated. Neither too much nor too little! I have been shaped by machines exactly fitted. Then I have been cooked at the right temperature. I am the fruit of men's work and also a fruit of their brain.



- I am also the fruit of men's labor, replied the other. And I am the fruit of their moods. When the flour was mixed with water, when the baker was kneading the dough, its joy and sorrow imprinted his gestures. What were his dreams, when he put me in the oven? The flames of the fire danced in his eyes. Maybe he was anxious to finish his work... Maybe was he thinking of his wife, of his children, of his sheep or of his dog? With his knife, he drew the traditional stripes on my back. I look like my brothers who were cooked the same day in the same oven. We carry the brands of the same man, but we do not carry the brand of the same thoughts.

- Ah, my rustic friend! It is obvious you never experienced the excitement of the big numbers. You don't understand the pride of being part of a cohort. Listen! We rose on the morning to conquer the city. We were arranged in large trucks. The gaze of men wandered over our powerful battalions. We were perfectly aligned, ready to satisfy thousands of stomachs. What a fantastic prospect!

- I've never been touched by this noble ambition, I confess. I probably lack your generosity. My thoughts are not as broad as yours. I only hoped to please a little girl or maybe her father. I wanted to enjoy the child's tongue or to provide strength to the farmer ...

- Provide strength? Here you are! You're lucky to meet me, because I'm an expert. My energy intake has been well studied: it is 2600 calories per kilogram. In the digestive system of the consumer, my starch molecules are cut into shorter carbohydrate ones. They enter the blood cells and bring the necessary energy. Want more information?

- No, really. I don't want to compete with you. Anyway, I would be unable to measure my features in such a precise way. My energy is that of wheat grains, gilded by the rays of summer sun. It is also the energy of the river, with its gravel and fish, the energy that makes the mill wheel turn. The grain was crushed between two blocks of granite, and I suspect that a little bit of this mineral energy passed into the flour. I do not forget the baker. After his job, the good man looks with satisfaction the batches of dough going in the oven. And I keep also in my heart the energy of the fire which gave the color to my crust and the softness to my flesh.

- Pull yourself together, please! Ah, you're a local poet, my dear! Obviously, you lack scientific knowledge. Reality is something else than a range of impressions. It is necessary to measure and to calculate. We must get standards and keep them. Otherwise it is a mess. The bread must be standardized, stan-dar-di-zed, I tell you. It is a job for specialists, for experts, for engineers.

You do realize that making bread is not an easy task. Bread is the staple food, the food par excellence of the Bretons. I am really frightened when I think that, during centuries, its making was devolved to craftsmen. These people have never had the slightest idea of the nutritional needs of their customers. They used the salt or leaven in a completely empirical way. They never knew what an antioxidant is or a flavoring agent. Humanity had a narrow escape, believe me. Forget about earth, rain, wind, baker's mood. These are silly things coming from a bygone era. Learn the ten parameters that define the diet and sensory qualities of a good bread ...

- Ten parameters, you say? That is fantastic... You feel happy and higher with ten numbers, while I contain all the shades and all the iridescence of the world! You want to rule over the natural wonders through your petty equations! You are a product of mechanics, sir. You are smooth, banal, standard. You cannot imagine anything else. Soulless machines gave birth to you. You think you can be defined by numbers. You are not bread, you are only a few numbers among other numbers...

- Take it easy, my friend, do not lose your temper! You cling to things that are not measurable. You have to understand. What is not measurable is unreal, useless, irrelevant ...

- We are not from the same social class. You mixed with powerful and overbooked people. I met with quiet ones. They were easily distracted by everything around. Their attention shifted from the wind blowing to the color of the grass. They spent time looking at a spider spinning its web or at an ewe calling its lambs. They found treasures of taste in the bread they eat, the wine they drink and in the air they breathe...

Night fell on the forest. Since their quarrel, the two pieces of bread had remained silent. They were sulking. The darkness and cold engulfed their figures. Around midnight, the urban one could not repress a complaint:

- I do not want to die here. Moisture torments me. The earth is too cold. The sky is too dark. I refuse ... I do not want ... I deny ...

- You are a creature of reason, said the other, with a hint of compassion in its voice. Now and here, your

numbers are hopeless. Your composition was studied, too studied probably, and not enough dreamed. So, you are a stranger in this Breton world. You will become a waste, and I can imagine the suffering of your damnation. As for me, during all my life, I bore the colors of this country. I'm going now to melt in the land of Broceliande, after being one of its emanations.



Travels in Brittany – An article from the National Geographic Magazine in 1965

The following article ties nicely into earlier notes in this issue of Bro Nevez about the renaissance of Breton culture in the post war period. While I am not reproducing the photography that made the National Geographic Magazine so popular among those seeking a glimpse of an exotic worlds beyond their travel potential, the text of the following article written in 1965 gives a glimpse of Brittany in the post World War II period. Although this travel writer visited Brittany less than 50 years ago, his documentation of the history and socio-economic state of Brittany is just as superficial as accounts provided by travel writers who visited Brittany 100 or 150 years ago. When you move to more recent times, travel writers tend to have a more positive view of Brittany, even if they include some of the same stereotypes travel writers of earlier centuries highlighted.

“France Meets the Sea in Brittany” by Howell Walker

National Geographic (Journal of the National Geographic Society) Vo. 127, No. 4, April 1965.

“If you wish to see the sacred treasure, address the *gardienne*,” said the notice. The words were crudely chalked on a blackboard hanging in the 13th-century church of a remote village named Paimpont.

So I knocked on the caretaker’s door, and a small somber-clad woman emerged – as if from the Middle Ages.

I followed her into the sacristy, an oak-paneled room as dark and mellow as fine old wine, of which it smelled faintly. Opening a cabinet, she withdrew a small crucifix and placed it close to the window. Soft silvery light – the light of Brittany - set in delicate relief every exquisite detail of the ivory-carved Christ.

“You understand French, monsieur?” the woman asked.

I nodded, waiting for her to tell me about the crucifix. Instead she turned to a machine, twisted knobs, and flicked a switch. Against a background of Gregorian chants, a tape-recorded voice commented on the carving by an unknown monk, his name lost in the long ago.

Electronics and Prehistoric Monuments

Hearing a tape recorder deep in rural Brittany seemed to me as anomalous as the medieval-looking woman’s ability to operate the machine. But Paimpont, like the rest of the province, showed me how surprisingly well the past and present can live together in a region I supposed time had forgot.

Soon enough I realized that my old-fashioned notions of a gray, granitic, sea-warped, somewhat primitive Brittany called for extensive updating.

In this northwesternmost province of France I moved from the prehistoric into the future, never in chronological order. Here stood menhirs and dolmens – those monumental enigmas in granite erected more than 2,000 years before Christ. Just over the horizon rose satellite-communication antennas that helped inaugurate transatlantic television. And between these extremes I found a wonderful confusion of time and place and change.

Nowhere highly mountainous or widely wooded, the gently undulating land is short of rivers, long on canals, extravagant with villages and churches, thrifty with cities. Summering places and fishing ports, along with commercial harbors and naval bases, civilize the sea-wild shores.

Here is a hauntingly beautiful province, enhanced by an atmosphere as subtle as beneficent. Moisture carried by sea breezes pervades the land and everywhere lends a peculiar luminescence to the light of Brittany. It’s a mystic light, lovely and illusory.

Less elusive is the air of Brittany. I can still feel it on my face, taste its salt on my lips, smell its freshness. And whatever the air’s degree of moisture - mist, drizzle, or downright rainfall – everyone seems to thrive in it.

“We Bretons are like fish,” a woman said to me. “We are happy with wetness. Perhaps it is because we live near the sea.”

Yet Brittany is not a predominantly maritime province; 42 percent of its people live by farming. Apart from several big shipyards, few heavy industries draw men from the soil and the sea. But tomorrow will tell another

story as France's program of industrial decentralization – to stabilize provincial populations and to distribute employment more evenly – scatters factories over the landscape.

Women's Caps Tell Where They Live

Brittany, a rocky peninsula thrusting toward the meeting place of the Atlantic and the English Channel, has some 750 miles of coast – jagged as the teeth of a saw. The province's area roughly equals that of New Hampshire and Vermont combined, but its population of the three million or so trebles the total of those two states.

A line drawn north to south through Brittany's center divides it into Upper Brittany on the east, Lower on the west. The easterners speak French and seem more French than the westerners, many of whom still cling to Celtic tongue and Breton traditions.

But today's changing attitude is typified by a group of women I found arranging flowers in a country chapel in Lower Brittany. They had been talking in Breton, but courteously spoke to me in French. I asked if everyone in this parish normally speaks Breton.

"Yes," replied one, "but more and more we are using French, especially with our children. You see, we want them to grow up to be French-speaking – to be French."

So the younger generation now speaks French at home as well as in school, and the average man in the west has laid aside his traditional broad-brimmed hat with ribbons flowing from a silver buckle at the back. But his black-dressed wife continues to wear the white starched coif that differs in style from district to district. Thus, by a woman's cap you can tell – if you've done your homework – where she comes from.

The Breton tongue still carries the influence of Celts who left England, beginning in the fifth century, to settle that corner of France known today as Brittany – Little Britain. And as in language, Brittany shares with England many legends: King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table; Merlin the magician; Tristram and Iseult. As firmly rooted as their mother tongue, these romantic characters still enchant the Breton shores and woodlands.

"A few years ago," a true Bretonne told me, "I met a Welshman who was visiting Brittany. We could understand each other, because our ancestors spoke almost the same language."

France and Brittany Meet at Fougères

In its early days Brittany relied on dense forests of beech and oak to discourage aggression from the east.

These forests, now all but gone, formed a natural frontier. And the Celtic tongue, like Brittany itself, held out for 1,000 years and more against French encroachment.

In fact, Brittany did not become officially a part of France until 1532. Even so, some proud provincials have refused to consider themselves anything but Breton, a race apart from the French. The saying, "I am not French; I am Breton," has been long a-dying.

One April evening, almost five centuries after French troops invaded the Breton forest and captured Fougères, I entered this town which is, according to a current guidebook, "situated at the frontier of Brittany and France." I encountered no formal or physical barriers, however – only vestiges of the wall that once girdled the Breton stronghold and its 12th-century caste with 13 stout towers.

Before dawn next day, mobs of fat cattle invaded Fougères. I estimated a thousand beasts in the market place just outside my hotel. Men shouted, bulls bellowed, cows moored, calves blared, and trucks made extravagant use of their horns. All in all, the cacophony of a carnival.

As a town on the actual border between Brittany and Normandy, Fougères offers a market for Breton black-and-white and Norman reddish-brown cattle. Beef-trading Fougères also operates many shoe factories. At one, which produces 2,500 pairs of women's shoes a day, I asked about export.

"To France, chiefly," said a company official from Brittany. "Also to Great Britain, West Germany, Scandinavia, Africa. Maybe to America, one day."

"By the way, I spent a year in Baltimore, teaching French at Johns Hopkins University. Now I stay in Fougères, because I married the boss's daughter."

Today the town turns out a tenth of France's footwear. For almost a century shoe manufacture has ranked as the leading industry of Fougères.

New Industries Spur Suburban Building

Historically, a high birth rate overcrowded Brittany with people for whom no jobs existed. As a result, younger men and women emigrated by the thousands. To curb this exodus, Brittany now campaigns for industries to absorb its youth.

"And this is all right with us," a Breton told me, "because we like to live and work in the shadow of our own church towers."

Rennes, the province's old capital and center of learning, sets an energetic example. Here the Citroën company – makers of some of France's most popular automobiles – recently built two huge plants. Subsidiary industries producing upholstery and general accessories have sprung up.

I visited a young couple in one of the new apartment buildings that house the growing number of workers in Rennes; it towered a dozen stories over a nearby 300-year-old farmhouse. Their living-room window faced a similar sky-scraper across a courtyard. And a television screen broadened their view.

"How do you like living here?" I asked.

"We've never been happier."

Such young newcomers help make Rennes one of France's fastest growing cities and Brittany's second largest.

Nantes, which ranks first, straddles the Loire River, 35 miles from its mouth. Like its native son Jules Verne, Nantes dreamed dreams that came true: a river harbor for ocean-going ships, a prosperous city despite the catastrophic destruction of World War II, a successful site for heavy industry.

But Nantes doesn't let its preoccupation with business interfere with *la douceur de vivre* – the sweetness of living. The city lies in a fertile valley blessed with Brittany's only vineyards. From the grapes comes a tangy white wine named muscadet, a very happy table companion of the *fruits de mer* for which Breton waters are renowned. Oysters and muscadet. Lobsters and muscadet. Shrimp, clams, crabs, periwinkles and muscadet. The sweetness of living.

Through sugar refineries, fertilizer plants, foundries, and forges, I engineered my way to Nantes' shipyards. Here I saw a new type of trawler nearing completion – a 240-foot-long vessel of some 2,000 tons swarming with painters, fitters, and electronics wizards.

The man who showed me around pointed to the foredeck: "Helicopter landing space – to take off sick or injured, if necessary."

We climbed to the wheelhouse, which was equipped with antiglare windows, radar, sonar, and enough other instruments to give even a jet pilot pause. From a swivel chair the skipper could easily reach any of the controls for maneuvering the ship and operating the trawl winch. Clearly the business of fishing had entered the push-button stage.

"But why," I asked, "that old-fashioned wooden wheel in the pilothouse?"

"For an emergency," my companion said. Then, after a moment's reflection, "I suppose the real reason, though, is tradition."

A pleasant drive down the valley put me in St. Nazaire, at the mouth of the Loire, France's longest river. Eighty-five percent destroyed in World War II, the town today stands almost entirely rebuilt. Even the Germans, who occupied it from June 1940, to May, 1945, would hardly recognize it. Only the mammoth German-built submarine hangar, impervious to repeated Allied bombing, remains as an example of the enemy's grim determination.

After the Americans broke out of Normandy in early August, 1944, the Breton ports of St. Nazaire, Lorient, St. Malo, and Brest became key objectives of the United States Third Army, under Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. Through these ports the Allies hoped to funnel supplies to their forces on the Continent.

General Patton, famed for dashing, slashing attack, sent his troops on a lightning-swift end run across this northwest corner of France. The Americans completely cut off the Germans on the Breton peninsula and liberated most of the province with dispatch.

But after the initial freedom of the Third Army's movement, the Brittany campaign developed into a series of stalemates. Hitler had ordered the fortress ports to hold out "to the last man, to the last cartridge." And the garrisons took their leader literally.

St. Malo and Brest capitulated only after bitter siege, when the ports were in hopeless ruin. St. Nazaire and Lorient did not surrender until the close of World War II.

At St. Nazaire I visited the Chantiers de l'Atlantique, the most extensive shipyards in France. In one corner I saw what looked like an inclined, heavy-bomber runway. This was the slip where the *France*, world's longest liner, took shape and was launched in May, 1960.

During our marathon tour, my guide identified himself only as Aoustin. I'd not heard the name elsewhere in Brittany.

"There are many Aoustins working here," he said. "Most come from La Grande Brière."

A vast marshy region to the north of St. Nazaire, La Grande Brière (the Big Swamp) has supplied the shipyards with labor ever since the days when ... But let the story continue in Aoustin's swampy homeland.

At the heart of this marsh lies Ile de Fédrun, an island of thatch-roofed stone homes. Canals slice the reedy area, and smaller waterways lead to the habitations. Each house has its black flat-bottom boat, or *blain*, just as a suburban home has its car.

Boatmen of La Brière Become Shipwrights

For centuries Ile de Fédrun and other communities of La Grande Brière lived in blissful isolation. Poling their blains along the watercourses, Aoustins and their cousins found happy hunting and good fishing. They grew vegetables on the limited dry ground available; kept sheep and a few cows; raised chickens, geese, ducks, and cut turf for fuel.

“Then, about 80 years ago,” a resident told me, “hard times [small crops and less game] forced the men to take jobs at the shipyards. But St. Nazaire was too far away for them to go back and forth to work every day. So they’d leave early Monday and not return until Saturday night. Each carried a basket of food to last the week and slept where he could – in homes of friends, in barns, anywhere.”

In time, of course, conditions changed, without seeming to change Ile de Fédrun. Nowadays big buses shuttle workers to and from the shipyards. But I saw men still poling blains on the canals; there stood the white-washed thatch-roofed houses of stone; and ducks even more numerous than Aoustins waddled all over the island.

I knocked at a snug house on Ile de Fédrun. Quite frankly I wanted to see the inside of this home that had such a charming exterior, and I admitted as much to the sturdy framed, black-clad woman who let me in.

Like the Ile itself, the dwelling had kept its character: rough-hewn rafters darkened by centuries of smoke from the huge stone fireplace; rustic wooden chairs around an everlasting table; cabinets with carved sliding panels enclosing built-in beds; faded family portraits on the walls; a large chart firmly nailed up near the front door.

“If you please, madame,” I asked, staring at the chart, “what is this?”

“That,” she said, “is the official registry of the ducks and geese on the Ile de Fédrun. Nine hundred people live on the Ile. They own many flocks that are permitted to wander at will – no fences.”

“But,” she continued, “one must keep track of one’s own. *Regardez* – in this column are the names of the families, and opposite each is a symbol. Each family cuts its own mark in the feet of the ducklings and

goslings. These symbols pass from generation to generation. It’s been *comme ça pour longtemps*.”

“How long?” The answer – an eloquent shrug of the shoulders.

Menhirs Mark a Forgotten Past

New highways and bridges now link La Grande Brière with places as different from one another as Ile de Fédrun and St. Nazaire; all lie within easy drive of any Aoustin’s cottage. Roads lead to a sophisticated resort called La Baule, basking beside its golden beach; the rustic fishing village of Le Croisic; hilltop Guérande, surrounded by 500-year-old walls; low-lying salt-pan settlements using the earliest method of evaporation under the sun; and the city of Vannes, inflated with pride in a huge new factory of the Michelin tire company.

West of Vannes I found myself in the far older world of Carnac. At no other place on earth can one see so many menhirs. These prehistoric monuments – blocks of granite weighing as much as 400 tons, some standing 20 feet high – range over long, flat fields and all but entomb little farms in the area. Larks rise and sing, their songs lost on the gray stone wilderness.

According to the official count, a total of 2,935 menhirs orient themselves generally east-west in a two-and-a-half-mile parade formed at least 4,000 years ago. But who marshaled these stony forces? How? Why? Scholars in this ancient field can only theorize that the stones stand as colossal funerary monuments of a pagan people, possibly connected with sun worship. But most Bretons prefer the heroic legends that really tell more about their own imaginations than about the enigmatic granite boulders.

Among the menhirs, I met a white-haired woman wearing the coif of Carnac, black shawl, and long skirt. Like other local folk, she made a modest living by reciting to visitors the story of these ancient stones. In a voice remarkably rich of timbre, she spoke in the dramatic tones Bretons reserve for the fearful and mysterious subject of death.

Trapped Soldiers Turned to Stone

“It was long, long ago. A mighty army was camped here on the very field where you now stand. One day a rumble as frightful as thunder warned the soldiers of approaching hostile forces, and they prepared for battle. But they could not stay the invasion. So, being well-disciplined troops, they began an orderly retreat toward the sea, in the hope of sailing away to safety.”

“Alas! There were no boats. No hope of escape. Then do you know what happened? These brave warriors became so determined to stand their ground that they turned to stone.” And if you don’t believe it, there they still stand like giant soldiers in precise battle array, rank on granite rank.

In far more recent times, 300 years ago, a site named Lorient was selected as home port and shipbuilding center for the French East Indies Company. But France’s loss of India to Britain in 1763 ended the venture. Even so, Lorient had got its start and its name – L’Orient meaning “the East,” the direction in which its early hope lay.

Since then – hope, despair, hope. Lorient’s story during and after World War II reads pretty much like St. Nazaire’s: Five years of German occupation and large-scale submarine operations; repeated bombings by the Allies; utter devastation of the town now 85 percent rebuilt.

Today, the new city of 80,000 inhabitants prospers as a shipbuilding center (prefabrication of naval vessels on the very site where the East Indies Company assembled its fleet); as a commercial harbor trading with the world; and, after Boulogne sur Mer near Calais, as France’s second most successful fishing port, annually handling 50,000 tons of 60 different varieties.

On Brittany’s Atlantic coast I moved along an endless chain of fishing ports, stopping now and then to talk with fishermen dressed in faded blue or lobster-colored stuff as tough as canvas. And when I reached the harbor of Concarneau, with its medieval island stronghold, I could no longer resist a fishing trip.

Sardine Boats Rely on Sonar

“Come to the quay at four tomorrow morning,” said Peirre Cossec, a friendly Breton who owned and skippered a sardine boat named *Notre Dame de Rennes*. It was still dark when “Our Lady” and a dozen others of Concarneau’s fleet of 150 sardine boats filed through the harbor gullet toward the Atlantic. For a while the vessels hung together like ships in a wartime convoy. At length they fanned out, each relying upon its sonar fish-finder.

Daybreak. Sunrise. Captain Cossec at the graph that registered the sonar’s findings. The 14-man crew smoking, joking, waiting for the skipper’s order.

Action. One of two dinghies went over the side, and two men boarded it. Then the second dinghy, also two men. The rest of the crew readied the net.

The *Notre Dame* slowly made a wide circle to set the 500-foot-long net around the dinghies, which were scattering bait – chopped cod in peanut flour. This tempting mixture brought the school of sardines to the surface. The net closed about them, and the deck crew began hauling it in. Cossec left the wheel-house to help his crew raise the treasure – myriad slivers of living silver, packed, of course, like so many sardines.

So *Notre Dame* fished throughout the morning. Sometimes a rich haul, sometimes poor, once or twice nothing at all. By noon the skipper estimated that he had netted more than a ton of sardines. He headed back to port. Giving the wheel to a crewman, Pierre Cossec sat beside me on the foredeck. At 50, he had thick black hair just beginning to gray. I had to urge him to speak of himself.

“Well, yes, I’ve always been a fisherman,” he said. “That is, ever since I was 13. I got to be skipper at 24 [a precocious achievement among weathered veterans]. But then I believe in sardines – believe Brittany’s are the best in the world.”

Bought as soon as they hit the Concarneau quay, sardines go straightway to local *conserveries*, or canneries. Canning is one of Brittany’s most remunerative industries.

So much for sardines. Bigger fish literally held the floor of Concarneau’s enormous market. Here I watched boats begin unloading their catches at midnight, as oilskin-aproned women wearing rubber gloves sorted the fish according to variety. With the accuracy of a big-league pitcher picking a runner off base, any one of these women could peg her fish 15 feet or more into its proper box. They kept up a spirited chatter, and fish flew through the air even faster than the banter.

The daily auction started at 7 a.m., and within several hours most of the fish were well on their freezing way in refrigerated trucks and railway cars to Paris or other cities. As the second busiest port in Brittany, Concarneau markets close to 50,000 tons a year – almost as much as Lorient.

On the other hand, a single fish made history in Quimper (pronounced camp-air). This cathedral town’s first bishop St. Corentin, nourished himself on a unique and miraculous fish. After eating half of it one morning, he tossed the remainder back into a fountain. Next day the half-consumed creature, having become whole, appeared again on the bishop’s plate. How long the saint continued to breakfast in this mysterious fashion, Quimper’s religious archives do not reveal. After all, the fish tale dates from the sixth century.

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