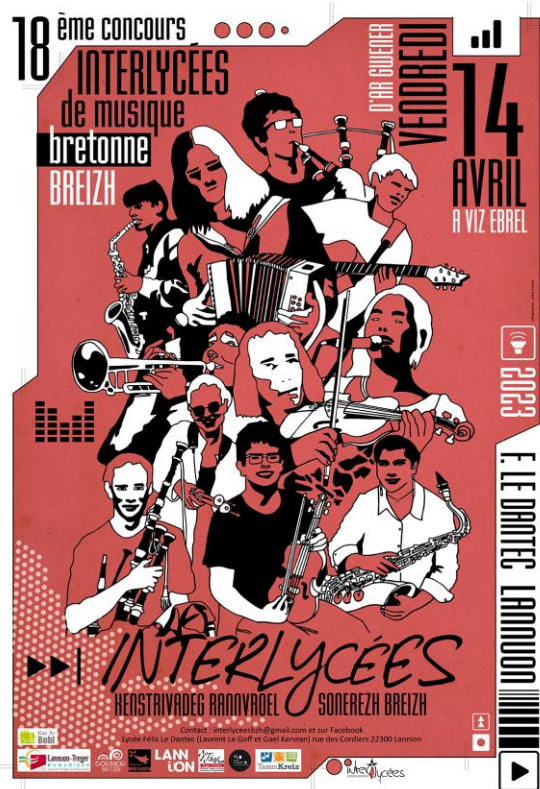


BRO NEVEZ

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



KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

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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 mail print copies. 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.

This newsletter can be sent as a PDF file attached to an e-mail instead of the print version. Just let the Editor know how you would like to receive it. The e-mail version is much more colorful than the photocopied print copy!

Back issues of Bro Nevez can be found on the U.S. ICDBL website

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



Editorial

I hope you will enjoy and learn something new about Brittany from this issue of *Bro Nevez*. It is always a challenge to keep up with events in Brittany from this side of the Atlantic, so information is not always of a timely nature. News for the Breton language shows that France continues to get in the way of real advances, while Bretons continue to work creatively to build schooling, media, and a public presence for Breton, and for Gallo.

Unless otherwise noted I am the author of all the notes you will find in these pages. New voices would be welcome! – Lois Kuter



Brittany News news.bzh

A website was launched in December to provide news and articles about Brittany to English speakers. This is the work of Philippe Argouarch, Charles Kergaravat, Jacques-

Yves Le Touze and Remy Peneg – all journalists active on websites, but publishing news primarily in French or Breton. As they state in an introductory e-mail announcing the new site: *Until today, Brittany did not have an international media source for English speakers on the subject of what is happening in Brittany and what matters to Breton people. And this despite the fact that Breton ex-pats and Brittany fans are scattered all over the world.*

This is indeed a welcome development for those who have no or only poor comprehension of French or Breton and the articles posted so far have a range of topics from the environment (a wolf spotting in Brittany), business and economics (Brittany Ferries, seaweed industry), the Breton language (Breton on Google Translation, state of funding for Breton), history (Bretons and Britons, genetic studies and Breton migration), and culture (the death of Jean Paul Corbinau of Tri Yann). Topics will also include politics, sports and anything else of interest to Bretons in all five departments of Brittany.

Brittany News is looking for English language local press correspondents, citizen reporters or journalists in Brittany as well as persons willing to help in designing, coding and proof reading the web site content or translating French or Breton texts in English.

Those interested in getting involved and contact Brittany News at in-english@brittany-news.bzh or en-francais@brittany-news.bzh

Check out the website news.bzh to take advantage of this new and interesting source of information about Brittany.



A New Website for Bilingual Education in Brittany

Ecole.bzh

This new site introduces the basics about bilingual Breton-French education and provides resources for parents who might want to locate a school. It is the collaboration of Diwan, public, and Catholic bilingual schools with support of the Region of Brittany and the Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg.

Readers of *Bro Nevez* probably don't need to be convinced of the benefits of bilingual education but here is my translation of the section on the ecole.bzh site for "Pourquoi choisir le bilinguisme français-breton?" which is addressed to parents exploring bilingual schooling for their children – LK

Why choose French-Breton bilingualism?

A curriculum in Breton open to all children

From preschool to graduation, the bulk of academic schooling is realizable in Breton to grow along with the language. Schools proposing a bilingual track for your children adapt all the programs of National Education. Among the three different teaching networks proposing Breton [Diwan, public schools, Catholic schools] you will surely find the pedagogical method that suits you.

The awakening to multilingualism

A child puts together his facility for language between 0 and 7 years of age. It's at that period that they learn to articulate sounds and link them to meanings. This facility is put together just one time in a lifetime. It's thus the best moment to stimulate children and teach them to speak several languages. The fact of linking several words to the same meaning enhances their reflexivity, their comprehension and their capacity for abstraction: competencies that nourish their way of seeing the world.

Breton, a language of Brittany

Bilingualism is built in an intelligent and stimulating way for a child when the language relates to their cultural, affective, and social environment. Learning Breton allows them to make sense of cultural and social elements that surround them because they live in Brittany. They can thus relate what they see

(countryside, art, music, gastronomy, shows) to what they hear in Breton (names, expressions, vocabulary).

Breton, a living language

In Brittany, Breton is the second most spoken language after French with 207,000 speakers. It's a language that does not stop evolving in line with its territory, its history and its population. Far from being set, the Breton language is present in the media, new technologies, public life, and public and road signage. The occasions to read, hear and speak Breton in everyday life are multiple and grow as the number of speakers grows.

A language full of meaning

To understand several language is a source of enrichment and expansion because each language has its semantic and cultural particularities. When one learns a language, one learns the world that goes with it. For example, there are numerous words that have no equivalent from one language to another. Numerous expressions exist only in one language and carry within them a philosophy unique to each culture.

A language that is part of the identity of Brittany

The Breton language is a natural presence in our everyday life, with place names, names of people, media, internet, social networks, publishing, recreation centers, and an increasing place in the professional world. Thus, learning Breton is an asset which allows one to take part in the cultural life of the region and to give it meaning.

The Breton language creates links.

Regional richness is synonymous with international sharing and exchanges. In fact, 46 million Europeans use a regional language every day and there exist over 80 different languages spoken in the European Union (which has "only" 27 member countries and 24 official languages). To speak a regional language is thus not a rarity. If learning Breton allows one to anchor an attachment to ones home place, it also allows the creation of links beyond our frontiers.

Different sounds of French to multiply learning.

The linguistic differences between French and Breton add diversity to a child's phonetic, lexical, and grammatical inventory. In fact, the sounds, vocabulary and the manner of building phrases in Breton are very different than for French. At the period when a child develops an ear, it is important for them to hear a maximum of different sounds. They will grow up thus with a larger phonetical palette. From the age of 2 to 3 a child learns to arrange the order of words to form phrases. There too, the important differences between

French and Breton allow a bilingual child to develop an intellectual flexibility which favors their capacity in other materials and in then learning other languages. To encourage the diversity of languages during early childhood is to allow ones child to gain learning facility for the length of their schooling.

Languages complement each other.

Languages are never in competition. The more one learns the easier it is to learn new languages. The more accustomed one is to moving from one language to another, the easier it is to learn new things. Thus, most early bilinguals develop an ease and logic of languages which allows them to become trilingual or quadrilingual by the end of their schooling.

The European Language Equality Network and Linguistic Rights in France (ELEN.ngo)

The European Language Equality Network operates on a European and international level to work for the defense of European languages and is made up of speakers of those languages from various European countries, including Brittany. The following is a Statement made at the December 2022 United Nations Forum on Minority Issues which underlines the issues that need to be addressed:

The European Language Equality Network is the leading organization working for the protection of European minoritized languages. Every day we deal with discrimination against these languages, many of which are endangered. The EU has the respect for linguistic diversity as a European Value, but we don't see much respect. In France we witnessed the censuring of new pro-language legislation by elements in the French Government that has had the effect of making all regional language immersion education "unconstitutional". ELEN issued an appeal to the UN, and the Special Rapporteurs for Minorities, Right to Education and Cultural Rights issued an official communication in May 2022 which France is yet to respond to. In Spain, we've seen a politically-driven campaign using the courts to overturn decades of best practice by ruling against the successful Catalan immersion model, despite education being a reserved matter for the Catalan Government alone. In addition, the EU has done little over 20 years to move forward on the issue.

There remains the need for clear, unambiguous language legislation that protects our languages. Therefore, taking into consideration the many excellent proposals made in the regional forums, we recommend that:

- 1) *The EU starts the procedure for a European Directive that protects minoritized languages.*
- 2) *That work commences on upgrading the UN Declaration on Minorities into a binding UN Convention.*
- 3) *That the UN Forum be extended in duration and that a Permanent Forum on Minorities is established, with a Voluntary Fund.*
- 4) *That States empower each language community or group in their jurisdiction with the powers and funding to manage their own language maintenance and recovery policies.*
- 5) *Finally, that France responds to the Special Rapporteurs Communication, ends centuries of systemic discrimination, and acts to protect its so called "regional" languages*

As noted in a press release by the European Language Equality Network (ELEN) March 1, 2023, marked the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Noted in this statement was the fact that the 25 Council of Europe member states that have ratified the Charter "are obliged to actively promote the use of these languages in education, justice, administration, media, culture, economic and social life, as well as in cross-border cooperation." While France signed onto the Charter, it has yet to ratify it.

The Regional Council of Brittany and the Breton Language

This February 2023 Brittany's Regional Council prepared its 2023 budget, and Breton language supporters were not pleased. In a press release and press conference in early February Rouedad ar Brezhoneg, a federation of major Breton language organizations, noted that an initial budget for 2023 showed a 2% reduction for Breton language initiatives, not even considering inflation. An open letter to Regional Council President Lo'ig Chesnais-Girard signed by 56 Breton language and cultural organizations echoed the displeasure.

Acknowledging the challenge of meeting needs in all areas of the region's life – maritime, agriculture, infrastructure, debt payment, environment, and culture and schooling – the budget for Breton was a major disappointment given increases in past years and the ambitious "Marshall Plan" for the Breton language proposed by the Regional Council President.

Although the budget for the Gallo language did increase, Bretons were angered by the fact that the budget for the Breton language remains less than 1% of the total budget (0.46% in 2022). The total Regional Council budget increased by 8% for 2023.

I have to admit that it was confusing to follow the numbers outlined in different reports and I failed to find

specific budget information for the Breton language on the Regional Council web pages. There was one ray of hope in media coverage this February in a report that the French Ministry of Education would support advances in Breton language teacher training.

Deep inside a Breton skull 73 A heritage, a just cause... or something else?

Jean Pierre Le Mat

What is Brittany?

The Breton supporters will speak to you about a nice language, a strong culture, a rich literature. They will make you listen to songs or music. They will talk about a long history, the history of our ancestors. And they tell us: this is our inheritance. This wealth, you must not bury it, you must pass it on, you must share it. Oh yes, I am OK!

And now today, it is possible to share Breton heritage in new ways. Brezhoneg is Wikipedia's 82nd language. ChatGPT speaks Breton. Breton music goes around the world. The cultural confrontation has become global. It is no longer a desperate struggle to be or not to be. The challenge for the future is to live in the common world, having Brittany as the central piece of our identity puzzle.

For some time now, the Breton claim has been integrated into a larger claim, the claim of the *minorities*. This universal claim is progressing and, in a way, it escapes us. If Brittany is reduced to an ethical claim, it will, one day or another, end up being integrated into the catalog of *just causes*. Such a success looks to me a little bit sad. A twilight. There will be countless menus in the French and international restaurants. We will be seated on comfortable seats and we will peacefully eat our *Breton pancakes*, while our table neighbors will consume their *sauerkraut* or their *couscous*. The craziest and most spirited will not find any taste in these dietary or "identity correct" dishes. They will escape and take the risk of starving to death. But, who knows, maybe they will invent a new way of life, a new culture, a new nation, or the revival of an old nation.

I know, I know, to be part of a minority is a good thing. I know that native languages and cultures are fashionable. I have been told that history gives rights. But, in Brittany, we are not accustomed to that way. Until now, the Breton claim always passed, not through ethics, but through aesthetics. Not through universal rights, but through artistic ways: paintings, songs, novels, poems.

The old songs of *Barzaz Breiz* give rise to an astonishing Breton rising in the middle of the 19th century. "Diougan Gwenc'hlan", "Jannedik-Flamm", "An Alarc'h" are jewels of a poetic rebellion. At the same time, Breton community feelings were reflected in French novels such as "Le Loup Blanc" by Paul Féval, "Quatre-vingt-treize" by Victor Hugo, "Les Mystères du Peuple" by Eugène Sue, and many others.

One of the first separatists of the 20th century, Camille Le Mercier d'Erm, brought together an anthology of "national bards and poets of Armorican Brittany". In the middle of the century, the artists of Seiz Breur claimed a Breton aesthetic. At the end of the century, musicians and singers, Glenmor, Stivell, Servat, gave Breton claims a shape and a style, much more than political writings.

While the French Republic claims a universal ethic, the most active Bretons claim instead a particular culture. The idealist settles on the most satisfying idea; the aesthete chooses the most satisfying attitude. One lives through ideas; the other through action and feeling. One strives for a global truth; the other points to his contribution to the beauty of the world.

While different beauties can co-exist, the truths are much more shadowy. Close truths stare each other down, compare each other, challenge each other. Old truths feel threatened by new truths. All truth is arrogant.

The citizen of a big nation can easily imagine he can embrace a universal truth. This claim is unreasonable for the man of a small nation. He knows that everyone starts from a particular point of view: that of the French or the Chinese, but also that of the financier, politician, civil servant or craftsman he really is. This reality is obvious to the man of a small nation, for it is not hidden or distorted by the shadow of greatness. When he scrutinizes the future, it is not what is true that interests him, but what is possible. What is possible is something particular. What is possible is evolving. It surprises, it charms, it irritates. What is possible can lead very far, but it does not necessarily become universal.

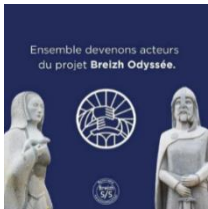
Beyond a nice heritage, beyond a *just cause*, deep inside my Breton skull, I consider Brittany as something else. I consider that Brittany is an adventure. An individual, a collective, an historical adventure...

Ulysses, in the *Odyssey* told by Homer, aimed at the harbor of Ithaca. But he never rejected the endless adventures offered to him along his way.

We, Bretons, must aim for a particular star, our star, without constraining ourselves to a straight line. During the Middle Ages, our ancestors called that star "King Arthur's return". The rebellious peasants of 1675 called it "Armorican Freedom". Then, during the following

centuries, it was called “National Liberation” or “Breton Republic”. Our star may be distant, perhaps inaccessible. It is mobile in the sky. Well, it is a star, not a fixed idea! We have been often told that it is only a hallucination. Anyway, everyone must walk towards his star.

The star of our sparkling Brittany shines over there, above the horizon. Do not sulk about the adventures that we will accept, consciously or not. After each of them, if we are still alive, we will look again in its direction.



What is Breizh Odyssey?

A note added by Lois Kuter

Jean-Pierre Le Mat sent this image along with his thoughts about Brittany, so I wanted to find out a bit about Breizh Odyssee (breizh-odyssee.bzh). This is an interpretive center based in Landevennec with the aim “to share and transmit the culture and heritage of Brittany so as to contribute to the building of a Brittany for tomorrow.” Open just this March, the center offers programs for a general public to present Breton history, culture, the natural environment, and economy. In communications and signage the center uses Breton, French, and English, with some Gallo. Located on the Presqu’île de Crozon, on the western Breton coast the center is well worth a visit not only for the chance to better understand Brittany but to enjoy the spectacular scenery of this area.



An Attack on Breton Journalism

Journalism can be a dangerous career. Journalists venture into war zones and dangerous environments to cover events, but even in the safety of their offices or homes, they can be threatened, injured, killed or

imprisoned for writing the “wrong thing.” This happens all over the world and stirred emotions this past February in Brittany when journalists of the weekly newspaper *Le Poher* based in Carhaix received threatening anonymous letters as well as bomb threats.

This was related to a contentious situation in the small town of Callac (population approximately 2,200) where a project based in the Paris area proposed the establishment of a refugee center in that town. The plan was abandoned by the mayor due to its challenge by a large majority of the town. While not necessarily anti-immigrants or racist, the inhabitants felt that in a situation where their children were forced to emigrate to

Paris or overseas to find work, this was not a welcome project for their town.

Whatever the reasons to reject a center to welcome refugees, the attack on the press who expressed their views about this should not be the target for far-right extremists, and it is not clear if this was action on the part on one individual or a more organized group.

Numerous media and organizations of Brittany joined with press groups in France to express their solidarity with *Le Poher* and their concerns for freedom of the press. A demonstration was held on February 25 which was attended by several hundred people – media, newspaper journalists, politicians, and citizens – to show support for *Le Poher*.

New Books from Brittany

Reviewed by Lois Kuter



Alan Le Cloarec. *L’Histoire du Nationalisme Breton – des origines à 1945*. Yoran Embanner. 2022. 409 pages. ISBN 978-2-36785-052-8.

There have been many books and articles about Breton nationalism and the Breton Movement, and certainly there is room for many more, whether they focus on a particular period, political party or organization, or individual nationalists. This book is valuable in thoroughly covering a long span of history starting with the beginnings of expressions of nationalism in the late 19th century through the end of World War II.

This is not an easy read, but Le Cloarec does a good job of presenting a very complex history in a clear and approachable manner. The notion of what is a “nation” and what this is based on – history, a common language and culture, religion, race – is already a moving target.

From the perspective of French historians, Breton nationalism is often viewed as aberrant – based on irrationalism, romanticism, mythology, or the product of anti-French hatred. The evolution of Breton nationalism is not a simple straight line and ideologies underlying its expression shifted and were influenced by wider trends in Europe. Understanding the transitions in Breton nationalism is not just a question of stringing together facts, but of understanding how the thinking of individual nationalists evolved in the context of their time period and the wider world in which Bretons developed ideas of Brittany as a nation. The fascism and antisemitism expressed in different periods of Breton nationalism was not unique to Brittany but was found widely in France and in Europe as a whole.

Le Cloarec focuses his attention on ideologies behind the organization of different groups and actions, and the different approaches expressed as to what Brittany as a nation was, is, and should become – a region or a nation within France with some power to more or less determine its governance?, a separate state entirely independent of France?, a nation within a federal Europe? ... Can one be both French and Breton? The multitude of names of groups and their publications, splits within groups, and changing participants can be confusing, but Le Cloarec carefully explains transitions and changes.

Key actors of different periods of Breton nationalism are presented as are their different approaches to Brittany as a nation. They are often at odds with each other as young Bretons displace older generation or leaders disagree on strategies. The author does not present Breton nationalists as heroes or villains, even if one may not like the particular ideologies driving their actions or publications.

The strength of this book is based on its extensive use of public records such as magazines, newspapers, books, tracts and posters used by nationalist groups to present themselves. But just as importantly the author has delved into unpublished private letters, memoirs and meeting notes which can present a different idea of what Breton nationalists were thinking.

In the preface to the book Ronan Le Coadic notes that the approach of Le Cloarec is one of humility and honesty in his effort to understand the complexity of Breton thinking without judging what is right or wrong in the ideologies of Breton nationalists and without an attempt to define “the truth.” I would have to agree with that and thank Le Cloarec for helping me better understand the long and complex history of Breton nationalism.



L'Evangile de Dahut. Selon Yann Dac'h A Laez (Jan Derboven). Yorann Embanner, 2022. 128 pages. ISBN 978-2-36785-060-3.

There is probably no better known tale from Brittany than that of Dahut and the city of Ys (Ker-Is). Yann Dac'h A Laez describes it as a “clear metaphor for the victory of the Christian faith over sinful paganism.” I especially appreciated the breezy recap of this tale as it is usually interpreted found in the preface by the author. It is worth including here:

In a few words: King Gradlon has built the beautiful polder town of Ys for his daughter Dahut, in which she can indulge in not too Christian excesses: nothing but food, booze and orgies. Gossip in abundance (obviously

...): every evening, she would take another lover whose throat she slit after having obtained what she wanted. Enter the scene from the right: the man named Guénolé, who wants to Christianize pagan Brittany, whining in vain that Gradlon should tame his wild daughter. Enter the scene from the left: the Devil! Disguised as a handsome guy with red hair, who seduces Dahut without problems and persuades her to steal from the neck of a sleeping Gradlon the key with opens the floodgates and floods the town of Ys. Which, of course, the wench does immediately. Gradlon, who suddenly reveals himself on the spot on his fast horse Morvarc'h, takes his daughter behind him to save her from the tidal wave that rushes in and threatens to overtake them. Guénolé, who suddenly reveals himself on the spot in his sandals, shouts that Gradlon must swing Dahut off his horse to save his own ass. Gradlon obeys the pious and merciful Guénolé, downs his daughter, and rebuilds the city 50 km away (Quimper). Guénolé becomes 'Saint' Guénolé. Curtain.

Yann Dac'h A Laez doesn't buy this version and has decided to retell the story from the perspective of Dahut. While the end result of flooding of Ker Is and the drowning of Dahut remains the same, the perpetrator who opens the floodgates is not Dahud or a Devil-lover. I will not reveal the name of the true villain here.

This retelling will delight those who like the idea of a free and open city full of people who live as they want in a world where respect of others and nature prevails. There are probably some who will be aghast at the beating Christianity and the Bible take in this revised tale. But it is the richness of the presentation visually that will be especially enjoyed. The author creates a “neo-medieval Celtic manuscript” based on the art of the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels. This takes up 70 pages of this 9 x 12 inch hard-cover book.

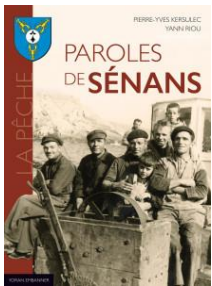
The elegant font used for the text – in French – takes some getting used to, but flows smoothly as one gets accustomed to the style. Each page on a “beige” base is full of intricate interlacing designs and drawings with of people and animals the compliment the text. You'll see the main and less central characters of the tale depicted as well as a number of animals – Dahud's red cat, dragons, horses, boars, birds, wolves and mice – as well as delicate plants and flowers. The detail and colors will definitely mean that you don't cruise through the reading quickly. I started with the manuscript and then found both a French and English transcription which followed in a more regular font. These correlate to each page so those who struggled with the ornate font or who don't have mastery of French will have no difficulty reading the tale.

Besides the transcription of texts, there are numerous footnotes about names and places and details in the illustrations. The notes have a touch of humor and also nicely present the sources of the author's inspiration and

how he took liberties with the reinvented tale. For example, a full page drawing based on Fol.7v of the Book of Kells shows Mary with the child Jesus and four angels. The author explains: “Instead of a Barney Rubble-like child, I put Dahud’s cat on her lap and surrounded her with her travel companions.” Those who never watched Flintstones cartoons on TV might miss the humor in this. Notes also provide historical background for people and places noted in the text as well as descriptions of musical instruments and their evolution and an explanation of the meaning of some symbols – Christian crosses, sun symbols, or the triskell.

I enjoyed this new version of this very old tale, but found it a bit simplistic in its depiction of good vs. evil. Instead of Dahut and Paganism as evil and Christianity as good, here Dahut and the free and open lifestyle of Ker-Is is good and the oppressive world of Christianity is evil. Dahut is a brilliant thinker and orator - a world traveler, open to ideas and wisdom of other cultures and discussion with people of differing viewpoints. But she is definitely dismissive of the Holy Book of Christianity with its “too many disgusting and fake stories.” In the book’s notes, Yann Dac’h A Laez draws from the Bible to show how it promotes men dominating animals and their submissive wives, not to mention killing in the interest of God. Although there is ambiguity, extensive citations of the Bible do back up Dahud’s skepticism about its wisdom.

Most readers will root for Dahud as the voice of reason and applaud her stances on equality of all people, anti-slavery, equal rights for women, and respect for nature and its plants and animals. She speaks out as a foe of injustice and oppression. While she is definitely virtuous she is also a bit self-righteous – “I am rich because of what we are creating here [Ker-Is], all together. We, by living without hate, without sin, without greed, we create happiness.”



Pierre-Yves Kersulec and Yann Riou. *Paroles de Sénans – Vol. 1, La Pêche.* Yoran Embanner, 2022. 464 pages. ISBN 978-2-36785-051-1.

The island of Sein (Enez-Sun in Breton) is located off the western coast of Brittany, facing the Pointe du Raz. Made up of just 143 acres and a population of 260 in 2019 – according to Wikipedia information - it is a small place, but is legendary for the departure of its adult male population in 1940 at the call of De Gaulle to join the French Free Forces. (See some varied short accounts of that in the “Travel to the Island of Sein” article later in this issue of *Bro Nevez*.)

This new book does not address that part of history but focuses on the Breton language and maritime life of the

island where agriculture is very limited. The authors of this book are not from the island of Sein but have long been engaged in studying the Breton language and its variations within Brittany. Pierre-Yves Kersulec is from the Glazik pays of the Vannetais region of Brittany. Yann Riou is from the Leon in northern Brittany.

Since 2010 for Kersulec and 2011 for Riou they have worked collecting examples of spoken Breton in different places – primarily near their home area. They were independently drawn to the Breton of the island of Sein and spent many years there recording speakers in what is described as an ethno-linguistic project where language is linked to the life of the speakers.

This book arises out of a desire to present their collection work in a way that organizes it by topic. They present untouched and unrevised transcriptions of the texts of their collection – in this case focused on maritime life, and building on the series of publications called *Ar Vag* begun in the 1970s.

In the introduction to this 464-page volume Kersulec and Riou describe the path they have taken in their collection work and link it to work done by other researchers and collectors documenting the Breton language and maritime life in Brittany. They also give a brief outline of how the Breton of Sein differs (and is similar to) Breton spoken in other areas. This is a short overview of work that Kersulec will publish in detail in a dictionary of the Breton of Sein to come.

This Volume I of *Paroles de Sénans* with its particular focus on the maritime world of Sein will certainly be of interest to those who want to delve into the Breton language spoken there or maritime history. The bulk of the book is made up of the accounts in Breton collected by the authors and a translation in French side-by-side. Each of the eight chapters of this book is broken down into subtopics and almost anything relation to maritime life is covered. While this first book focuses on the work of men, the authors acknowledge the central role women play in the fishing trade and their perspective should be covered in a future volume.

Each chapter starts with a short introductory section which gives an overview of the topic addressed, and this is especially helpful to those with no or little familiarity with a maritime world (like me).

Chapter 1 is of a general introduction to fishing but covers the details of learning the trade, observing sea and weather conditions, preparing nets and equipment, getting the catch, and the different types of fishes and crustaceans sought, among other topics. Chapter 2 focuses on different zones for fishing – specific geographical areas and the particular fishing done in those zones. Chapter 3 speaks to the preparation of

boats, from their building to the care of motors, sails, fishing lines and other parts of a boat.

Chapter 4 focuses on different fishing lines and how they are used and Chapter 5 covers the use of traps to capture fish or crustaceans – think lobster pots. Chapter 6 looks at the use of nets and Chapter 7 covers pretty much every other fish and fishing technique used, including “pêche à pied,” gleaning shellfish at low tides. Chapter 8 covers navigation – learning how to fish and read the seas, including life on shore, superstitions, and shipwrecks.

The use of first-hand accounts and anecdotes personalizes the information and this is supplemented by several hundred photos of people, places and boats. Maps and drawings are also effective in helping to understand tools and techniques of fishing described.

There are frequent footnotes to clarify details or to reference more information. A bibliography of articles, books, and audiovisual resources is also included in the book.

Annexed to the main section of the book is a list from 1937 of all the fishing boats in the fleet of Sein for that period – a high point of activity. This notes the type of boat, size, where it was constructed, its name, launch date, the captain/owner, and the kind of motor it had (if it had one). Also annexed is a lexicon of over 150 terms in the Breton of Sein, with an equivalent in more standard Breton and a French translation.

While I normally read a book from cover to cover before reviewing it, in this case I only skimmed the main content, although I look forward to exploring more. My knowledge of the Breton language and the maritime world does not qualify me to do a true review of the book’s content, but hopefully this overview of the wealth of information in *Parole de Sénans* will provide an introduction to this book.

Anyone interested in the Breton language and/or maritime life in Brittany – especially ocean fishing – will find this book extremely interesting in its rich documentation.



Deiziataer from Skol An Emsav

Skol An Emsav, founded in 1969, is probably best known for its many year of organizing Breton language classes for adult learners, but for many years it has published the monthly magazine *Bremañ* and in more recent years the magazine *#Brezhoneg* aimed at learners. And, it has

also annually published a day planner to schedule your time entirely in the Breton language.

Roughly 3 ½ inches wide and 6 ½ inches long with a hard cardboard cover front and back the 1923 edition is spiral bound, making it easy to keep open to whatever week you want to see. The bulk of the planner is made up of the section for planning. Spread over two pages there is space for you to enter appointments or perhaps just write down events or observations as a kind of diary for each day of the week. American are used to calendars that start out the week on Sunday, but it is very easy to adjust to a week beginning on Monday. Since we call Saturday and Sunday our “weekend” beginning on Monday certainly makes more sense.

On each day the associated saint(s) are noted and the beginning of different seasons (goañv – winter / nevezamzer – spring / hañv – summer / and diskar-amzer – fall) are also noted, along with a few holidays. You will also find a saying or proverb in Breton for each week which will induce some research to find its translation! As you move through the planner the color changes for each month which is a nice navigation aid. Even if you choose not to write in the *Deiziataer* it will reinforce your vocabulary for names of the months as well as days of the week:

Months of the year (starting with January):

Genver
C’hwevrer
Meurzh
Ebrel
Mae
Mezheven
Gouere
Eost
Gwengolo
Here
Du
Kerzu

And for days of the week (starting with Monday):

Lun
Meruzh
Merc’her
Yaou
Gwener
Sadorn
Sul

At the beginning of the planner is a condensed listing of months in columns side-by-side going from top to bottom with day 1 to 30 or 31, or 28 in the case of February. These are also color coded to correspond to the main pages. Lines run through some of the dates in three different colors which seem to correspond to different groups of cities in France – time zones? These were a mystery to me but probably mean something to Breton

users of the planner. A similar arrangement of months in columns with different colors is also found at the back of the planner for the year 2024.

But there's more to the planner than just a scheduling option. The 2023 edition starts with a page for you to enter your contact information, another learning opportunity:

Anv – last name
Anv-bihan – first name
Chomlec'h – address
Telephone number for *er gêr* (home) and *el labour* (work)
Mobile phone number – *pzg hezoug*
e-mail at home and work (*er gêr, el labour*)
contact for a doctor – *medisin*

You'll also find a nice map spread over two pages with the names of the historical "bro" and their flags: Bro-Zol, Bro-Wened, Bro-Gernev, Bro-Leon, Bro-Naoned, Bro-Roazhon, Bro Sant-Brieg, Bro Sant-Maloù and Bro-Dreger. A smaller inset shows the administrative departments of Brittany: Penn-ar-Bed, Aodoù-an-Arvor, Mor-Bihan, Il-ha-Gwilen and Liger-Atlantel. The larger map also shows towns, cities and islands and their Breton language names.

Also useful is a mileage chart so you can see how many kilometers it is from, say, An Oriant (Lorient) to Pempoul (Paimpol) – 138. Other useful additions to the day planner are a page showing how to write a check in Breton and the chart of mutations - those changes to first letters of a word that are so challenging for learners.

There are also some colorful pages of "advertisements" for different organizations and publications entirely in Breton – Skol an Emsav, Ti ar Vretoned in Paris, Yoran Embanner, Al Liamm, Stumdi, Mervent, Diwan, Musique Bretonne and others. What I most appreciate is the directory of organizations with street addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail and website addresses. These include Breton language support groups, schools, cultural centers which offer classes, a number of cultural organizations for sports or music, publishers, media and radio, and Breton language publishers.

In comparing this year's planner to one I have from 2007 there is just one element that has not been added - an alphabetical listing of the communes of Brittany in all five departments. This lists the French version of a town name on the left and the Breton version on the right with the "postal code" between them which identifies in which department they are found. For example, Questembert – 56230 – Kistreberzh is in Morbihan. This adds some 50 pages to the 2007 planner, but I have been surprised at how often I have consulted this directory of names to determine the Breton version of a place or to locate its general location. The downside to the 2007 planner is

that it is bound like a book so that it is much more cumbersome than a spiral-bound planner.

The *Deiziataer* of the present and past years is a mini-reference guide to Breton language organizations and resources which is valuable whether you take advantage of the weekly planning option or not. Bravo to Skol an Emsav for the continued publication of the *Deiziataer* which helps us be mindful of days and months of the Breton language year and the organizations that support the Breton language and culture.

Losses for the Breton Language and Culture

Noted by Lois Kuter

Fañch Peru (1940-2023)

This January Brittany lost one of its finest Breton language writers, Fañch Peru, at the age of 82. He was born in Ploubezre of a father who was a sabot maker and a mother who kept the Café de la Gare in Kerauzern. During the Occupation in World War II, Fañch Peru spent his childhood with grandparents in Vieux-Marché. He would later teach at the Savine middle school in Tréguier and took up writing in Breton in 1966, publishing articles in reviews such as *Ar Falz*, *Brud* and *Pobl Verizh* as well as some twenty books of stories and poetry in Breton as well as French or bilingual. In September 2021 he was awarded the prestigious Xavier de Langlais prize for this writing.

Fañch Peru served as the mayor of Berhet from 1983 to 2001 and was active in supporting all aspects of Breton culture. He is also remembered as a lover of nature, sculptor, and collector of Breton crafts, with a passion for traditional Breton sports and games.

Yvonne Breilly-Le Calvez

This past February Yvonne Breilly-Le Calvez passed away at the age of 99. She was a teacher and school director who tied her love of music and vocal and piano talents to her teaching. For her excellence in teaching she was awarded the Palmes Académiques in 1974, the Prix René Mougler in 1977, and the Ordre National du Mérite in 1980.

After retirement she created the Chorale d'Enfants des Marsauderies which developed into the FA SI Nantes choir which she directed. In 1990 the choir would become part of the Kendalc'h confederation and its Breton quality would be confirmed by a repertoire where 90% of the texts were in the Breton language. In 1993 the Breton identity of the choir was affirmed again in taking the name Ensemble Choral Anna-Vreizh and it

would participate regularly in the Kendalc'h/Kanomp Breizh festival called Breizh a Gan.

For her engagement for Brittany and its culture Yvonne Breilly-Le Calvez was inducted into Brittany's Order of the Ermine in 2008,

Gigi (Gilbert) Bourdin (1947-2022)

At the age of 72 Gigi Bourdin passed away this past October. Born in Pluherlin in the Vannetais-Gallo area of Morbihan he lived for many years in Mellionec (Côtes d'Armor). He made a living as a psychologist and then as a singer, author and poet. He grew up with music in his home and song was part of the everyday life of the community.

I did not know Gigi Bourdin but certainly knew his voice. My first introduction was a selection on the 1977 LP *Bogue d'Or 2 – Chants traditionnels Haute-Bretagne* (Groupement Culturel Breton des Pays de Vilaine). He also led a "suite de tours" on Dastum's 1984 LP No. 8 – *Chants et traditions, Pays d'Oust et de Vilaine*. I also found him on two of the Chasse-Marée maritime double albums of 1984 and 1985: *Chants de Marins III – Chants de Bord des Baleiniers et Long-courriers* and *Chants de Mariniers V – Gens de Rivière et Bateiers des Fleuves de France*. On this second album featuring songs of river vessels he sang with Christian Dautel and Eric Marchand, and this trio would put out one of my all-time favorite LPs of Breton music in 1988, *Chants à répondre de Haute Bretagne* with its dances and the slower swing of marches from Gallo Brittany.

While Gigi Bourdin continued to be an ambassador for the extremely rich song tradition of Gallo Brittany at festoù noz and festivals of Brittany he would become famous among a younger generation with his participation in Les Ours du Scorff and then Ânes de Bretagne where animals played a large part as the subject of songs he composed. While this music was for children it had a strong appeal for adults as well, and I treasure among my CD collection the 1996 Les Ours du Scorff album *La maison des bisous*. This was not a solo project but one where a number of Brittany's best singers and musicians collaborated: Lauren Jouin, Fañch Landreau, Soïg Siberil, Jacques-Yves Rebault, Frédéric Lambierge and guest Antonin Volson and Jacky Molard.

I can't recall having seen Gigi Bourdin perform live in Brittany, but surely I must have heard him at a fest-noz or festival at some point during by 1978-79 stay. I was able to hear him live in the summer of 1989 at the Festival of American Folklife in Washington D.C., an event still held annually by the Smithsonian Institution and National Park Service which features different American and world traditions. The contingent of singers

and musicians from Brittany in 1989 included singers Gigi Bourdin, Christian Dautel, Eric Marchand, Albert Poulain, and Jean Gauçon and Joseph Quintin (hurdy gurdy and song), Gilbert Hervieux and Olivier Glet (biniou and bombarde makers and players) and Thierry Bertrand (veuze player and maker). While not performing music Patrick Malrieu and Veronique Perrennou from Dastum were also part of this Breton delegation. While not part of the Breton group, John Wright and Catherine Perrier, engaged for many years in supporting and performing traditional music of Brittany and other areas of France, were also at the festival.

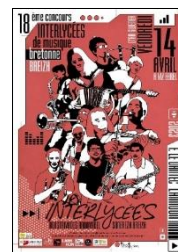
Gigi Bourdin will be remembered for his fine voice, creative song lyrics, respect for Brittany's oral traditions, and his ability to make children and adults feel good when he sang.

Jean-Paul Corbineau (1948-2022)

This past December Brittany lost Jean-Paul Corbineau at the age of 74. He was one of the original "Three Yanns" of Tri Yann an Naoned - later known simply as Tri Yann – along with Jean Chocun and Jean-Louis Jossic. Tri Yann was on the music scene for over 50 years and is one of the most widely recognized groups of Brittany. Beginning at the end of 1970 they brought a different look and sound to concert performances with a blend of medieval and rock looks and sounds. No other group so seamlessly combined vocals with bombardes, crumhorns, harp, fiddle, flutes, electric guitars and a number of other instruments. Their repertoire included songs from the other Celtic countries as well as arrangements of Breton melodies and dances and their own compositions. Performances were also dramatic visually and musically, with elaborate costumes and lighting.

The three Yanns were inducted into the Order of the Ermine in 2020 for their many years of contributions to the Breton music scenes and their outspoken support for Breton culture and the reunification of Brittany – their hometown of Nantes is after all the ancient capital of Brittany.

Young Bretons and Music



Kenstrivadeg al liseoù / 18^{ème} Concours Interlycées

If one doubted the engagement of young Bretons in the performance and creation of Breton music it is only necessary to look to two events coming up this spring.

On April 14 the Inter-High School Contest for Breton music will take place at the Félix Le Dantec high school in Lannion. This is the 18th year for this very hotly contested competition for high school groups who use this as a launch pad for performances at festoù-noz and festivals. The winner of the festival is guaranteed bookings at some of Brittany's summer festivals.



Fest-noz al liseidi / Fest-noz des lycéens

On March 11 a fest-noz for high schoolers was held in Cavan. It featured some of the past winners of the Inter-lycée contest – Llym and Skrijus from the 2022 competition – as well as up and coming groups like Tahlfour and Kenstag who will be competing in this year's competition. Also performing at the fest-noz will be a young saxophone-drum duo called Envel et Thélo and a group from the Redon area called Les Américains du Désert which formed at the Festival of the Accordion in November. That's certainly an intriguing name since it seems unlikely these musicians are Americans or from an American desert even if their photo places them there. More to be learned about the inspiration for that name.



The Fest-Noz – alive and well

The website tamm-kreiz.bzh is an important resource for keeping up with music in Brittany with a directory of thousands of singers and musicians (past as well as present) and calendars of upcoming events.

From the second half of March through April, 185 festoù-noz and festoù-deiz are listed for all five Breton departments, with a dozen outside of Brittany. And there are plenty of concerts, workshops, and other musical events also to be found. In statistics gathered for past years Brittany has hosted over 1,000 festoù-noz each year and 2023 seems to be on track for that number, despite economic challenges faced by the organizations that organize these events.

The entry fees for a fest-noz have always been kept low so that while the admission fees pay for musicians and site expenses, these are not exclusive events. One definitely has the opportunity in Brittany to dance and to hear Breton music from traditional song to electrically and electronically charged groups. For young musicians especially, the fest-noz is an event where you can learn

from more seasoned musicians and where mastering the rhythms of the dances of Brittany is critical in grounding an amateur or professional career.

Winter Festivals of Brittany



Zef et Mer

Leszefetmer.bzh

The 10th year for the Zef et Mer festival was held from January 16 to February 13 this year in a range of towns and cities of eastern Brittany – Nantes, Plérin, La Bouëxière, Rennes, Plédran, Guer and Orvault. This festival is actually a series of concerts and festoù-noz during this period of time and features a variety of musical styles – new creations with roots in the Breton song and musical tradition.



Deizioù An Oriant

Emgleobroanorient.bzh

Organized by Emgleo Bro An Oriant since 1985 the Deizioù (days) of Lorient are held during February and March in different locations in the area of Lorient. There are over 100 events including concerts, festoù-noz, workshops, exhibits, conferences, theater, cinema and cuisine.



Roue Waroch

Roue-waroch.fr

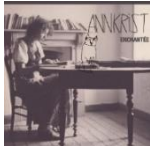
After two years of suspension this major festival held this year on February 17, 18 and 19 is back and celebrates its 25th anniversary. Attracting some 7,000 visitors, it is put together by the organization Petra Neue and held in Plescop in the Vannetais area of Brittany.

Featured in the programming are winners of various contests held leading up to the festival who are recognized for their contribution to the Breton music scene. Young and less young these are amateur musicians – paired biniou and bombarde, song, dance, and groups of various make-up or solo instrumentalists. They perform at concerts during the three days of the festival along with professional musicians of Brittany, and this year some ensembles from South America. And, of course, festoù-noz and festoù-deiz are held throughout the festival.

Besides the Roue Waroch festival the organization Petra Neue also fosters teaching of Breton music in the area of Vannes and children in Breton language programs worked during the year to prepare a creation for the festival called "Dre ar Wenojenn."

Heard of but not heard – New albums from Brittany

Information for these short notes were gleaned from *Ar Men* 252 (Jan.-Feb. 2023), the Coop Breizh website and various web pages. While the title for this section of *Bro Nevez* has been “heard of but not heard,” it is now commonplace to be able to hear samples of CDs. The Coop Breizh website has added this feature to its presentation of CDs that can be purchased from them, and “googling” performers names usually brings one to options to hear some of their music.



Annkrist. *Enchantée*. Cristal Productions.

This is a 3-CD set of songs in French sung and composed by Annkrist. With her unique voice and vocal style her songs speak of life's sadder side in most cases. Her voice is supplemented by musicians of talent as in the days of the Nevenoe Coop of the 1970s (included in this set of CDs) where you hear Patrick Ewen, Gerard Delahaye, Gildas Beauvir, Melaine Favennec, Kristen Nogues and others.



Barba Loutig. *Blev*.

This is a CD of 12 selections featuring a variety of Breton dances and songs in Breton and French with innovative use of polyphony – not traditionally found in the Breton song tradition. The four women of the group are Loeiza Beauvir, Lina Bellard, Elsa Corre and Enora De Parscau.



Cabaret Richer Octet. *To pa ri ti*. Musiques Têtues. CMT-266019.

This group is led by clarinet players Étienne Cabaret and Christophe Rocher with roots in jazz as well as the clarinet tradition of Brittany. The jazz style is dominant and others in the group are: Hélène Labarrière (bass fiddle), Céline Rivoal (accordion), Régis Bunel and Stéphane Payen (saxes), Christelle Séry (electric guitar) and Nicolas Pointard (drums).



Concerto Soave & Jean-Marc Aymes. // *Canto Nobile*. Lanvellec Editions LE0007.

Described as Trégor-Baroque this work by Jean-Marc Aymes who directs the Concerto Soave is focused on two lesser-known Italian composers of the beginning of the 17th century – Jacopo Peri and Sigismondo d'India. The Concerto Soave is composed of singers María Cristina Kiehr and Romain Bockler, Ulrik-Gaston Larsen on the theorbe (a lute), Flore Seube on viola de gambe, and Jean-Marc Aymes on harpsichord.



Forzh Penaos. *Roc*.

This is the fifth album by with well-known Breton band with 10 selections featuring Breton dances with a style described as “progressive rock.” Forzh Penaos has been performing for 30 years and is a favorite on the fest-noz music scene. The group is made up of Philippe Boisard (flute), Sébastien Carney (electric and acoustic guitars), Cédric Moign (biniou and Scottish bagpipes), Tanguy Molard (bass), David Baton (rhythm), Yvon Molard (drums), and Christophe Perves (bombarde).



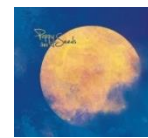
Cécile and Dominique Moisan. *Celte Attitude*.

The Dominique Moisan Orchestre has been around since the 1990s but here he pairs with Cécile Moisan for a CD of 17 compositions – dances of various inspirations which draw from Breton, Irish, South American, Spanish, and other world destinations.



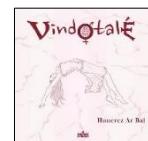
'Ndiaz. *La Brune*.

This is a CD with 7 selections of dance inspired by the Breton dance tradition but with a jazzy swing. The seasoned members of this group are Youn Kamm (trumpet), Jérôme Kerihuel (drums), Timothée Le Bour (sax) and Yann Le Corre (accordion, electrovox).



Poppy Seeds. *Aris*. Lenn Productions.

Breton musicians have had a long-term love for and definite mastery of traditional Irish music, and the group Poppy Seed puts out its fourth album of Irish dances and melodies from concert performances. The group is made up of Benoît Volant (fiddle), Camille Philippe (vocals, mandolin, guitar), Tom Lemonnier (guitar, bouzouki) and Pierre Cadoret (flutes).



Vindotalé. *Hunrez Ar Bal*.

This is a CD of 10 compositions inspired by the Breton tradition and the wider Celtic community with a pop style. Begun in 2019 the group includes singer Bleunwenn and guitarist Gwenolé Lahalle. In 2022 Benoît Guillemot added drums and Stéphane De Vito joined with bass.

The Breton Language and the Indiana University Center for Language Technology Celt.indiana.edu/portal/Breton/

I am not the most skilled user of internet resources, but every now and again I manage to find something unexpected and interesting. In this case I stumbled upon a presentation of the Breton language on the website of the Indiana University Center for Language Technology. Having completed graduate studies at IU in the early

1980s I was pleased to find this short but useful introduction to Breton, including a map showing Brittany's location in Europe with a Brittany of all five departments.

The Center for Language Technology website helps students (and others) locate languages taught at IU and the Language Portal section lists over 100 languages of which 65 are taught at times at the university. Breton is one of the languages listed although it has not been taught at IU. For each language a brief description is given of its state of being and location and opportunities to learn it or find resources about it.

For the Breton language the description includes the note: "Breton is a severely endangered Celtic language spoken mainly in Brittany (Breizh) by about 210,000 people, about 35,000 of whom use it as an everyday language. It is spoken mainly in western parts of Brittany, and is also spoken to some extent in parts of eastern Brittany, and by Breton immigrants in other parts of France, and in other countries. Breton is classified as 'severely endangered' by the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger." The presentation also provides a link to a bit more basic background on the Omniglot website: omniglot.com/writing/breton.htm.

Following the brief description of the status of the Breton language are three short samples of song. These are not identified but I recognized two of them immediately and the third sounded very familiar.

First is a recording of Marie-Josèph Bertrand with a few verses of "Distro ar Martolod." This is preceded by some conversation at the 1959 collection session by Claudine Mazéas. The full song is found on *Dastum No. 5 – Bro vFañch*, an LP and 100-page booklet published in 1978.

The second song sample of kan ha diskan for a gavotte sounded very familiar, but I was unable to match it with anything in my CD or LP collection. Perhaps it was drawn from a Dastum archive recording I copied in 1975 and gave to the IU Archives of Traditional Music (with Dastum's permission).

The third selection was a very interesting choice – an example of the use of Breton for less traditional song. In this case it was the group Storlok's "Boutou koat dre dan" from their album of 1979 *Stok ha Stok*. They were pioneers in using the Breton language for new compositions, but there have certainly been many singers since who compose in Breton,

Thank you, Indiana University for ably presenting the Breton language in the Center for Language Technology website.



Travel Accounts for the Island of Sein

In view of the book reviewed in earlier pages of this issue of *Bro Nevez*, **Paroles des**

Sénans, I thought it would be interesting to pull out some descriptions from travel accounts by American and British writers. Travel accounts by tourists who spend very little time in Brittany cannot be counted on for accuracy – all the more reason that the collection of accounts from Sénans themselves is important!

For the 19th century I could find no accounts of travel to Brittany's islands, except for a few for Ouessant. This is certainly not surprising given the lack of easy transportation for tourists at this period. The earliest account I found among my books and journal articles was from the 1920 publication by **Ange Mosher**, *The Spell of Brittany* (NY: Duffield and company). Here is what she says (first-hand account?) of the Island of Sein:

Following the coast line to the north we find the island Sein, the Sena of the Roman historian. The passage from the Pointe du Raz to this island is dangerous, and the ancient prayer still serves the mariner of to-day: "Help me, O God, in crossing the Raz. My boat is so small and the sea is so large."

It is a bleak bit of an island and is associated with the druidesses – for the tradition is that on this island lived the nine damsels to whom was entrusted the sacred vase of the druids. These gathered, with strict regard to planetary rule, the potent herbs which, mixed with foam of the sea, and boiled a year and a day, furnished the water of inspiration to the druidic bard. The decoction was placed in a sacred vase and three drops of this mystic brew. Placed upon the lips by the hand, enabled him to behold the future.

To-day we find druidic stones survive as souvenirs of the sacred nine who inhabited the island. There are but two wells of water on the island, these to-day form the centre of social life. Young girls fill their water jugs and lean upon the railing listening to the tales of the lover. The scene reminds one of patriarchal days. In the little church the poetic Breton Angelus is still sung. But, unlike their neighbors of the island of Ouessant, alcoholism has made a footing on the isle of Sein. Every pretext for libations is improved – baptisms of babies, baptisms of ships, religious fêtes, weddings and burials. They make a pleasure of becoming intoxicated – suggesting a touch of epicureanism which Horace would have loved.

Other accounts of travel to Sein that I found date from the second half of the 20th century, and almost invariably include reference to the role of fisherman in World War II. Here is an account from the **National Geographic**

(Vol. 127, No. 4) of **April 1965**. This is from **Howell Walker's article "France meets the sea in Brittany."**

I sailed out to the mile and-a-half long treeless Ile de Sein in a boat carrying two calves, tinned foods, mail, and a dozen passengers. We landed at the only village of the low-lying isle – lying so low, in fact, that high seas have twice flooded it. A quorum of its 1,100 inhabitants waited on the quay.

Village streets barely wide enough for a wheelbarrow give islanders some protection for unceasing, often violent winds. Where the houses end, a few potato plots and an occasional cow find shelter behind wandering stone walls. A lighthouse, braving the gales, towers over the little island.

On surrounding reefs countless ships have foundered – not to the disadvantage of Ile de Sein. Nowhere else off the coasts of France has the business of picking up the pieces continued for so long or with more success. Salvaged material furnishes the island homes, provides fuel and building timber. Apart from capitalizing on wrecks, though, selfless men of the local lifeguard station have stake their lives to save many a crew.

Understandably, such a poor, storm-lashed isle makes the best of a shipwreck. But what occupies the people in fair weather? The men fish. The women, dressed and hooded in black like characters in Renaissance sketches, do manual work, including hard labor. It was the women who carried stones on their heads to build the island church.

During World War II every able male on the island answered the call of Gen. Charles de Gaulle. More than 500, some as young as 14, sailed to England to join the Free French.

After the war General de Gaulle personally awarded the Cross of Liberation to the island, with this citation: "Ile de Sein; in the face of enemy invasion, refused to abandon the battlefield, that was hers: the sea. [She] sent all her sons into combat under the flag of Free France, thus becoming the example and symbol of all Brittany."

In the article "**Islands out of time**" by **Linda Dannenberg** for **European Travel & Life, December 1987**, the author reports on Ouessant, Molène and Sein. Here is what she says about Sein:

Sein is another diminutive world unto itself. About one hour by boat off the coast of Audierne, with 504 inhabitants on its scant half-mile-square area, Sein is like a small cheerful village that somehow dislodged from the mainland and floated out to sea. Not far in nautical miles from Ouessant and Molène, this island enjoys an entirely different climate: it is dry and bright, with as many sunny days, the local like to say, as Biarritz.

Sein's population – fishermen famous for their fearless sea-rescue teams – lives in three hundred small stone houses, some dating from the 1600s, huddled around the massive seawall of the port. Many of the streets, alleys really, that separate the village houses are scarcely a yard wide. Twenty-seven small fishing boats, worked by the island's forty-three active fishermen, are moored in the harbor. At day's end their blue nets dry in the sun on the Quai des Paimpolais.

Alain Leroy, the island's imposing, mustachioed mayor, calls his fellow islanders proud and fiercely loyal to their island, generous, and deeply religious. "They are also respectful of life," he adds, "as anyone in a perilous occupation would be" Countless survivors of shipwrecks have, over the years, been brought back to Sein, given the islanders' own dry clothes, fed, and lodged in island homes until they were ready to leave.

Early in the Second World War, the men of Sein achieved another kind of renown when they were the first group to answer de Gaulle's call from London for volunteers for his Free French Forces. Almost every able-bodied man on the island – 130 in all – set off in his fishing boat to join de Gaulle's new troops. Many other Frenchmen made their way to Sein, where they were taken by boat to England. De Gaulle himself came twice to the island to thank the population of Sein.

There is little to do on Sein but walk in the village, sun on the rocks or on the sandy beach, and scavenge for shipwreck booty among the ocean's sad littler that washes ashore. Or, like the old fishermen, you can sit on the seawall and gaze out to the horizon where, as island myth has it, the silhouette of a great ship appears through the fog at dusk, an omen of an impending disaster at sea.

[the article goes on to describe lodging options and restaurant offerings - a major part of most travel articles of more recent decades.]

Guidebooks that cover all of Brittany give some coverage to "the islands" and the following is from **Insight Guides – Brittany, 1990**.

Almost due south of Pointe de St. Mathieu, the westerly limit of the area known as Léon, is Pointe du Raz in Cornouaille, where, once again, the land seems reluctant to give way to the sea without a final token effort. In this case, the final effort is Ile de Sein, which is so flat and lies so low in the surrounding waves that severe storms threaten it with inundation.

Only five miles (eight km) offshore, Sein is a mystical place and its inhabitants, Les Sénans, of which there are fewer than 1,000, are a hardy people who survive by fishing and by cultivating small plots of land sheltered by

elaborate networks of stone walls which keep out the salt-laden wind.

Bretons call Ile de Sein Enez Sun, and it is suggested that this helps to identify it as the Isle of the Dead, a burial place of the Druids. It is also said to be the Romans' Insula Sena, a mysterious island where sailors used to consult an oracle tended by nine priestesses.

As in the case of Bréhat, Sein is an island with two almost separate parts. Near the isthmus which links them is a monument to history less remote than the era of the Romans or the Druids. It commemorates 18 June 1940, when 150 Sénans men left their native isle and sailed to England to continue resistance against invading Germany.

While there are no doubt more mentions of the island of Sein in recent guidebooks and travel magazines, the following from 2012 is interesting in noting the threat of rising sea levels as well as in detailing the role of Sénans in World War II. The following is excerpted from an article by **Maïa de la Baume**, “**Île de Sein Journal – Having Defied the Nazis, Islanders Take on the Sea,**” published in the **New York Times, July 24, 2012.**

The 130 inhabitants of this tiny island off the coast of Brittany are survivors.

They and their ancestors, who trace their origins to the Celtic druids, have lived through frequent periods of hungers, a terrible flood and two cholera epidemics. During World War II, many of the islanders refused to accept German occupation and fled by boat to join Charles de Gaulle's Free French Army.

Today, the residents of Sein are confronted by a more existential threat. With increasingly rough storms and a global rise in sea levels of 0.14 inches per year since the early 1990s, the existence of the island – just 5 feet above sea level, on average – seems increasingly at risk....

The Île de Sein is a treeless, question-mark-shaped island of 138 acres, regularly swept by heavy winds. It gets more than 2,000 vacationers in August, but has no police officers or cars or bank,. In the 17th century, King Louis XIV rewarded the islanders for having rescued several crew members from a sinking ship by exempting them from paying property taxes, a privilege they still hold.

In this westernmost part of France, the sea has already swamped the island twice, in 1924 and again in 2008, when a deadly storm called Emma lashed the island with waves as high as 26 feet that damaged sea walls and flooded homes. The water even invaded the small granite chapel of St.-Corentin, built in the 1970s, on one of the highest spots of the island.

... Rising sea levels have threatened the existence of small island states such as Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, the Maldives and Tuvalu. In fact, the government of Tuvalu announced recently [2012] that Tuvaluans would need to leave for good within 50 years.

But the residents here prefer not to talk about evacuation or displacement. They are particularly attached to what some called their “fragment of land.”

“The Île de Sein is a symbol of solidarity and collective spirit,” said Jean-Pierre Kerloc'h, the mayor. He credited the islanders' “spirit of resistance” for their ability to cope with the hostile environment. It is not just a question of the weather; the islanders are renowned for having played a significant role in 1940, as some of the first in France to resist the Nazis.

A granite sculpture representing the Cross of Lorraine – the symbol of France's Free French Army – commemorates the islanders' role in World War II. Carved in the stone is the inscription “Kentoc'h mervel,” which in the Breton dialect means, “We would rather die.”

In June 1940, as the French government was preparing to sign an armistice with the Nazis, 128 men of the island sailed off to join the Forces Françaises Libres, de Gaulle's resistance army in London. (The Île de Sein had a little more than 1,300 inhabitants then.)

... [the article goes on with some reflections by Sénans on their role in World War II]



Are the numbers cited by travel writers accurate?

It can be difficult to find reliable sources for statistics of a particular place like the Island of Sein, but I was able to find some numbers on population so that one can compare the population noted in travel accounts with what seem to be more reliable numbers.

The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of France (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques / INSEE) is the most reliable source and it was not easy to navigate the dense information to be found on their website (insee.fr), but I did find statistics for 2019 for the Ile de Sein.

In 2019 the population was 260

The map.france.com website provide a breakdown of earlier years, and it appears that this information was drawn from INSEE. Clearly the population has been declining as smaller fishing enterprises lose viability and as islanders must seek jobs on the mainland of Brittany.

2007 – 226
2006 - 238
1999 – 242
1990 – 348
1982 – 504
1975 – 607
1968 – 835

Likewise, the numbers for those who took off for England at the call of General de Gaulle in World War II can vary in travel accounts.

The cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr website notes that “128 Senans finally assembled in England.” This seems an accurate number and one can find the names of those Senans on the site.

Wikipedia, where there seems to be a call for validation of numbers, notes that “every male aged between 14 and 59 (or 60, according to the island’s official website) (variously totaled as 114 to 128) set sail in their fishing boats for Britain.” Perhaps I did not search hard enough but I could not find information about World War II on the “official website” for the Ile de Sein referenced in the Wikipedia entry as Mairie-iledesein.com.

While the numbers may vary – 130, 150 and over 500 cited in the travel accounts above – it is clear that the Senans responded early and strongly to the call for soldiers for the Free French Army of de Gaulle and that this remains a part of their history that is cited often in post-World War II travel accounts.

What Wisdom is to be gained from Googling “Brittany, France”?

Besides links to encyclopedias, Wikipedia, and tourism sites, Google provides a summary of mini-facts for those searching a particular topic. These are drop-down answers to questions that can be educational but are sometimes out of date, or in need of a “fact-check.” This was true in the case of my search for “Brittany, France”. I have not included all of the questions and answers you can find, but the following give a flavor of the “wisdom” to be gained. The final question and answer simply goes off the deep end.

People also ask

What is Brttany in France famous for?

Brittany is a wild and windswept region in Northwestern France that's best-known for its medieval fishing villages, rugged coastline, and its fierce independence from the rest of l'Hexagone. - Aug 5, 2022
From mhzchoice.com - Brittany Guide: 10+ Must-sees and Hidden Gems of Bretagne

Why is Brittany different from France?

Brittany is distinct from other French regions because of its Celtic heritage. About one-quarter of its population of 2,815,900 (1992 est.) are able to speak Breton, a Celtic language similar to Cornish and Welsh. The language, customs, and costumes are preserved mainly in the more isolated west.

From discoverfrance.net

Do people from Brittany consider themselves French?

Currently, most Bretons' native language is standard French. Brittany and its people are counted as one of the six Celtic nations. Ethnically, along with the Cornish and Welsh, the Bretons are Celtic Britons.

What language is spoken in Brittany?

Breton (Breizh) is a Celtic language spoken in the Brittany region of France, with an estimated 500,000 speakers, though this large number is deceptive in that most native speakers are above 60. Breton (Breizh) is a Celtic language spoken in the Brittany region of France. From elalliance.org – Endangered Language Alliance

What is the typical food in Brittany France?

The cuisine of Brittany is full-flavored, bringing the outdoors and the sea into the kitchen. It is a fresh mix of mackerel and sardines, pork rillettes and Breton pancakes. Cider and crêpes add a dash of sweetness. Jul 15, 2013 - From France.fr

What are people from Brittany called?

The Bretons of Brittany, France or Breizh, as they call their native land, are the last vestiges of the Celtic Britons that migrated from Great Britain and gave their name to this northwest section of France. They speak both their traditional language, Breton or Brezhoneg, and French, France's first language. - Jul 4, 2022 - From owlcation.com

What are Breton physical traits?

Bretons, by and large, are pale-skinned and slight humans, less muscular than Nords and Redguards, and possess more defined features such as high cheekbones and pronounced brow ridges. Some even display pointed ears much like elves. - Mar 5, 2023
From Eusp.net – Lore:Breton - the Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages. [Hopefully readers will go to this site to see that it is devoted to fantasy games and publications. The section on “Bretons” – no relation to people in Brittany - begins with the statement: “Bretons (from the Ehnofex *baratu* meaning “half”) are a hybrid race of both human and elven ancestry...”]

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