

BRO NEVEZ

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



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KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

No. 167

Sept. 2023

Bro Nevez 167

September 2023

ISSN 0895 3074

EDITOR'S ADDRESS & E-MAIL

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

215 886-6361
loiskuter@verizon.net

U.S. ICDBL website: www.icdbl.org

The U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language (U.S. ICDBL) was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation on October 20, 1981. Bro Nevez ("new country" in the Breton language) is the newsletter produced by the U.S. ICDBL. It is published quarterly. Contributions, letters to the editor, corrections, and ideas are welcome from all readers and will be printed at the discretion of the Editor.

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.



Editor's Note: Unless otherwise indicated, I take responsibility for all content in this issue of *Bro Nevez*. I would welcome contributions from others for future issues! – Lois Kuter



A New School Year for the Breton Language

Unanet evit ar brezhoneg voices its concerns

The following is drawn from a press release by the coalition Unanet evit ar brezhoneg published September 5 on Agence Bretagne Presse. – LK

In view of the September visit to Rennes by the Minister of National Education, Gabriel Attel, the four groups of Unanet evit ar Brezhoneg were received by Mme Tchou-Conraux, the new advisor for regional languages in the cabinet of the Ministry of National Education. These groups are Diwan (immersion Breton language schools of Brittany), Div Yezh Breizh (parents of public school students), Divaskell Breizh (parents of Catholic school students) and Kelenomp! (association of Breton teachers). They presented their concerns about France's fulfillment of commitments made in the *Convention spécifique pour la transmission des langues de Bretagne et le développement de leur usage dans la vie quotidienne 2022-2027* (Specific Convention for the transmission of the languages of Brittany and the development of their use in everyday life). This was signed on March 15, 2022, in Rennes in the presence of the Prime Minister of France, Jean Castex.

The Convention calls for a 50% augmentation of bilingual teaching by 2027 – 10,000 more students in five years for Diwan, public school bilingual programs, and Catholic school bilingual programs. This would require a major effort in teacher training, adding some 400 more.

The Unanet evit brezhoneg press release notes that this 2023 school year has seen the smallest increase in bilingual sites (just four) in many years. New openings are hampered by a blockage of competent Breton language teachers trained and placed in posts outside of Brittany who seek posts in public schools of Brittany.

Also a problem is the fact that a plan to train monolingual (French language) teachers for Breton language posts which has been requested is still not in place even though the State has managed to do this in Corsica, the Basque country and Occitania with

teachers being able to keep their posts and salaries during training.

For Diwan, difficulties remain in resolving the transfer of “school fees” from communes where students reside to Diwan. Clearly mandated to implement this, the former prefect did not act to resolve this issue. Another issue is the failure to complete a State-Region-Diwan Convention to resolve the status of new schools.

Appointing new Breton language teachers as well as training new ones is critical to meeting the State’s Convention obligations. Unanet evit ar brezhoneg hopes that the Minister of National Education will respect the State’s commitments.

Websites:

Diwan: diwan.bzh
Div yezh Breizh: div-yezh.bzh
Divaskell: divaskell.bzh
Kelennomp !: kelennomp.bzh

Distro-skol – 2023 School year return for Diwan

While statistics are not yet available for the bilingual programs in the public and Catholic schools of Brittany, Diwan reports on its website that it has maintained stability in numbers despite a drop in the number of students in the schools of the Academy of Rennes (four departments of Ille-et-Vilaine, Côtes d’Armor, Morbihan and Finistère). Students in Diwan schools number over 4,000 in all five departments of Brittany (including also Loire-Atlantique) with some gain at the preschool and primary school level but some loss at the high school level in the wake of baccalaureate exam changes introduced by the French Ministry of Education. Diwan has 47 pre and primary schools, 6 middle schools and 2 high schools with a site in Vannes as well as Carhaix.



Breton language names for children still under attack

The French government will be taken to court by parents banned from using the name Fañch when registering the birth of their son this June in Lorient. The mayor of Lorient Fabrice Loher interceded to approve the correct Breton spelling of Fañch (the equivalent of Francis), but the Public Prosecutor for France in Lorient then sent a letter notifying the parents that this “error” in spelling must be corrected since the tilde (ñ) is not part of writing in the French language. As stipulated in the

French Constitution only French can be used for administrative affairs.

While the National Assembly of France passed a law on regional languages in 2021 (called the Molac law) the part allowing for the use of accent marks found in the regional languages for official use was then stricken by the Constitutional Council of France, along with parts of the law enabling immersion teaching of regional languages. (see *Bro Nevez* 159, June 2021).

In 2019 another family went to court and the Court of Appeals in Rennes ruled in favor for Fañch – two years after his birth. However, this was before the Constitutional Council ruled in 2021 that the tilde and other accents not in the French language were unconstitutional. Thus the French judiciary court of Lorient has ruled that this new Fañch must officially be Fanch.

Confusing? Bretons are not confused about the right they should have to legally name their children with Breton names. A number of Breton leaders have spoken in protest of this ridiculous idea that banning names like Fañch will protect the unity of the French Republic. To be continued ...

A Loss for Brittany and the Breton Language: Marcel Texier (1934-2023)

Marcel Texier was born in 1934 in Carentoir in the Morbihan department of Brittany. With a degree in English he spent several years teaching French in England and Sweden, and then in the United States from 1966 to 1968 – at Southwest College in Memphis, Tennessee, and Kalamazoo College in Michigan. It was in returning from the U.S. that he became aware of his Breton identity and the Breton language which he learned and defended throughout his life. Upon return to France he became a full-time professor at the École Supérieur d’Arts et Métiers in Paris where he remained for 23 years before retiring in 1998.

The first letter I received from Marcel was dated September 10, 1981, on the letterhead of the International Association for the Defense of Menaced Languages and Cultures (Association Internationale pour la Défense des Langues et Cultures Menacées – AIDLICM). He remained active with this organization and served as its General Secretary from 1978 to 1982. He was also active with the Federal Union of European Nationalities (Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes) and was a member of the Consulting Council of the Institute for the Ethnic Rights and Regionalism Group (Institut International pour le Droit des Groupes Ethniques et le Régionalisme). He

served as President and Vice President of the Organization of Bretons Abroad (Organisation des Bretons de l'Exterieur) and served with the Association Européenne des Linguistes et Professeurs de Langues. All of this allowed him to maintain ties with minority peoples throughout Europe and he was well aware of language policies in other countries that contrasted with those of France. (see below)

My correspondence with Marcel Texier spanned all the years between 1981 to the present and his letters and e-mail texts were always in impeccable English. His letters contained a variety of news about action to support Breton and minority languages of the world. He would be the recipient of every issue of *Bro Nevez* published from the very first and Marcel was always encouraging in his response to receiving these. I had the pleasure of meeting him and others of the Breton community in Paris in the fall of 1982.

Marcel was active in support of the Breton language on many fronts – including a personal campaign to write checks in the Breton language. He took action when Newsweek International sent his check for a subscription renewal back in February 1989 because their bank would not cash it (and noted the reason as “amount not written in words”). Marcel responded by sending the check back and noting that the check was legally valid and should not have been rejected by the bank. By early April Marcel received an apologetic letter from the individual responsible for Newsweek subscriptions in France. She explained “When we received your cheque we didn’t realize that it was written in the Breton language – as this is the first case we have come across.” Marcel’s subscription was extended for six weeks and he was asked to forgive Newsweek for the trouble they caused him.

In December of 1997 I received the following statement from Marcel about how France carries out ethnocide of its languages. It is worth reprinting here:

Ethnocide: “Do it yourself!”

There is no doubt about it: ethnic cleansing is abominable! Linguistic cleansing or “ethnocide”, however, makes it possible to achieve the same results without bloodshed, without antagonizing international opinion, with loss of respectability.

How can you very effectively implement your ethnocidal programme while keeping undesirable side-effects down to a minimum? Here is an infallible recipe:

1. You write in your Constitution that the majority language shall be the language of the State. Thus, all other languages will, in effect, be outlawed.

2. Proclaim that no minority exists on the State territory since all the citizens enjoy equal rights. This sounds very generous.

3. Fly to the rescue (in words only, that will suffice) of all the minorities to be found on the territories of other States: excellent for your image!

4. Should it so happen that the existence of languages other than the State’s official language simply cannot be denied, see to it that less than 1% of the population concerned be taught to read and write in that language and that access to the media be as limited as possible.

Mind that 1% It is enough to lure the population into believing that if they keep quiet, their fate will gradually improve. At the same time, you can safely bet on the complete destruction of the so-called minority or regional language within one or two generations.

The beauty of it all is that you can call the while proclaim yourself the unchallenged World Champion of Human Rights!

Marcel Texier was a regular contributor to the journal *l’Avenir de la Bretagne* from 1983 to 2003.

He authored *La Bretagne n’a pas dit son dernier mot* in 2004 (Yoran Embanner) – see review in *Bro Nevez* 91, August 2004.

In 2002 he was the co-author with Diarmuid Ó Néill for *Rebuilding Celtic Languages* (Yoran Embanner), a study on revitalization of the Celtic languages based on the principles of Joshua Fishman. This would be augmented and published in 2005 as *Rebuilding the Celtic Languages – Reversing Language Shift in Celtic Countries* (Y Lolfa Press). Edited by Diarmuid Ó Néill (1962-2021), who had revived the Canadian Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language, this included contributions from a variety of authors including Marcel Texier for Breton. See *Bro Nevez* 95, August 2005 for a review.

Brittany will miss this ardent defender of the Breton language and culture, and I will certainly miss his always-encouraging letters and the wealth of information he shared with me over the years.

Bretagne Celtique! Colloquium

As noted in *Bro Nevez* 166 (June 2023), the Cultural Institute of Brittany (Skol Uhel ar Vro) organized a colloquium on the Celtic history and identity of Brittany held at the beginning of the Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient on August 4. A U-Tube recording of the presentations can be found on the website

skoluhelavro.bzh/colloque-bretagne-celtique-le-film. A description of the colloquium and its participants (in Breton, French and English) can be found on bretagneceltique.bzh.

Presenters for the morning sessions which focused on early history of Brittany and the Breton language in relation to the Celtic world gathered five archaeologists and historians: Barry Cunliffe, Fabien Régnier, Patrick Galliou, Hervé Le Bihan and Simon Rodway.

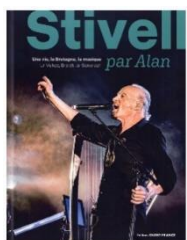
The afternoon session focused on Breton identity as a Celtic identity and Inter-Celtic relations in more recent history. Five speakers – historians, journalists, and authors – were: Corinne Poulain, Erwan Chartier, Roger Faligot, Joël Cornette, and Rozenn Milin.

A round-table gathered five others to address contemporary Breton identity: Rozenn Leroy (President of Kenleür), Malo Bouëssel du Bourg (Director of Produit en Bretagne), Jean-Philippe Mauras (Director of the Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient), Nolwenn Faligot (designer and president of Pevarzek), and Alan Stivell who was the featured participant for the entire event.

Besides welcoming remarks by leaders of Skol Uhel ar Vro, short speeches were also given by Niall Burgess (Ambassador for Ireland in France), Loïg Chesnais-Girard (President of the Region of Brittany), and Fabrice Loher (Mayor of Lorient).

Singer Morwenn Le Normand served as an “emcee” and performed several songs in Breton during the program, and shared leading the closing “Bro Gozh” with Alan Stivell.

Presentations eloquently underlined the long history of Brittany’s Celtic identity and relationship with the other Celtic nations.



Alan Stivell Autobiography – *Stivell par Alan*

If there is any Breton musician who is known in the U.S., it is most definitely Alan Stivell who has introduced Breton music and Brittany to

Americans otherwise totally unaware of their existence. And Stivell has been an ambassador for Brittany worldwide, a lifelong defender of the Breton language and culture, and more widely of the Celtic identity of Bretons.

His use of the Celtic harp would inspire its renaissance in Brittany (and he authored the book *Telenn, la Harpe Bretonne* in 2008). His songs and instrumental arrangements which combined acoustic and electric

instruments would inspire young Bretons to rediscover their musical heritage in the 1970s and beyond. While rooted in traditional music of Brittany and other Celtic nations, Alan Stivell has always known how to innovate with new creations, including a symphony.

Now he will tell his own story in an autobiography to be published by Édition Ouest-France and distributed by Coop Breizh, Amazon, and any number of book stores in Brittany. Entitled *Stivell par Alan* (subtitled *Une vie, la Bretagne, la musique / Ur Vuhez, Breizh, ar Sonerezh*) it will include some 200 photographs and previously unpublished materials from his personal archives. Although there have been several biographies previously published about Alan Stivell, no one can tell the story of his life better than Alan himself.

Le Championnat des Sonneurs 2023

Championnatdessonneurs.fr



The championship for sonneurs held in Gourin in September is one of the highlights of the year for those who love the paired playing of bombard with biniou bihan (also called biniou kozh) and bombard with biniou bras (adapted Scottish style bagpipes). Back from the Covid break, this contest and festival is bigger than ever with concerts, exhibits, reed-

makers and instrument craftsmen, and workshops.

One can hear the paired sonneurs throughout the year at various festivals, concerts and festoù-noz in Brittany, but the weekend in Gourin gathers the best, and offers the opportunity for younger players to get an earful – literally – and show off their talents.

Leading up to the September 2 & 3 weekend three pairs of sonneurs (sonneurs de couple) were present on three weekends of August at the marketplace of Gourin: Elouen Irvoas & Morgan Nicolas, Morgan Le Loupp & Tangi Pensec, and Per Vari Kervarec & Briec Colleter.

On the eve of the championship, a concert in the church of Gourin was held featuring two ensembles. First was the ensemble of bombards called Ortolan made up of twelve bombard players who come from long experience as members of a bagad, in pair with biniou, and participants in a number of groups which combine acoustic and electric instruments. They arrange traditional Breton melodies and dances and also draw from other musical cultures and perform new compositions. And, they sometimes invite other musicians of note for concerts, often performing in churches to take advantage of their exceptional acoustics. Members of Ortolan for the Gourin concert:

Richard Bevillon, Hervé Chevrollier, Nathalie Drant, Christian Faucheur, Hervé Guillo, Alain Kerneur, Didier Le Bot, Fabrice Lothodé, Jean Luc Michel, Celine Poupon, Eric Quémère, and Gildas Roger. One might wonder what twelve bombards playing together might sound like when even one is very loud, but bombards come in various sizes and keys so the opportunity for innovative combinations of sound is endless.

Also in concert was the Trio Hervieux/Mahé/Hervieux. Combining bombard, organ, biniou and song, Gilbert Hervieux and son Wenceslas Hervieux and Dominique Mahé draw from traditions of the Vannetais area of Morbihan where Gallo and Breton are both spoken. Called “Le Sauveur des Âmes / Salver an eneanoù,” the performance had as a theme pleasures and regrets, angels and devils.

The Saturday, September 2nd festival began with a dance workshop by Kenleur for beginners and those more practiced. Competitions that day were for a variety of combinations – young sonneurs (under 20) for march/melody and dance, family pairs of sonneurs, free duos (bombard or biniou with another instruments), and dances.

A concert followed the contests by the Bagad Jeunes Sonneurs de Sonerion made up of some forty youth (ages 11 to 22) drawn from the bagadoù of Sonerion (formerly known as Bodadeg ar Sonerion). And, of course, the day ends with a fest-noz with musicians who have won some of the championship contests as well as the group Skeduz and Storvan, well known for their concert and fes-noz performances.

Sunday, September 3rd began with more contests of various groupings and dancers followed by a theater/musical production called “Loened fur ha foll” by Morwenn Le Normand (song) and Roland Conq (guitar). This bilingual Breton/French performance was for an audience of children and families as well as adults. A fest-deiz and fest-noz followed with some of the champions of the weekend contests as well as champion sonneurs of the 1990s.

Highlighted among the sonneurs de couple was the duo of Jean Baron and Christian Anneix celebrating 50 years of paired playing as well as participation on a number of ensembles and musical creations. Other champion pairs of past Gourin competitions at the fest-noz were Gilbert Hervieux & Jacques Beauchamp, Pierre Crepillon & Laurent Bigot, Jorj Bothua, Pascal Guingo & Philippe Quillay, Fabrice Lothode & George Cadoudal, and Gildas Moal & René Chaplain – all well known to those who love the unique sound of Brittany’s sonneurs de couple.

Some 2023 Contest results:

Paired bombard and biniou bihan (19 contestants)

1. Julien Tymen & Michel Kerveillant
2. Jeff Le Gouarin & Tudual Hervieux
3. Erwan Hamon & Sylvain Leroy

Paired bombard and biniou braz (16 contestants)

1. Christophe & Jean-Michel Mahévas
2. Goulven Henaff & Alexis Meunier
3. Gweltaz Rialland & Julien Grellier

Young sonneurs (10 contestants)

1. Iban Jouanno & Hélori Saout
2. Swan Guillas & Mathéo Guillas
3. Tudual Le Gouarin & Ider Josso-Arhird

Family

Swan Guillas & Jean-Michel Mahévas

While performances from this year are not yet posted you can hear past winners as well as performances by the bagads of Brittany on sonotek.sonerion.bzh.

Festivals are Back in Brittany

While Covid took a temporary bite out of Brittany’s music scene, one would never know it from the current health of festivals in Brittany.

The 52nd edition of the 10-day Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient this August attracted over 900,000 visitors (165,000 ticket sales) with over 300 concerts. This was a 30% increase over 2022. And this does not count the 1,4 million people who viewed the retransmission by France 3 television of the Grande Parade which was attended in person by some 90,000 people. Each year the festival features one of the Celtic nations (Ireland this year) and in 2024 it will be the youth of all the Celtic nations who will be in the spotlight.

While the Lorient Inter-Celtic Festival has always been one of the biggest of Brittany (and France), it takes second place in size (ticket sales) to the Vieilles Charrues in Carhaix which features a mix of musical styles and stars from around the world as well as Breton music. During its five days it attracted some 273,000 attenders.

According to an article posted on Actu.fr/Bretagne (by Florian Tiercin, September 8) here are the top 16 festivals of Brittany by attendance. Lest anyone think that Bretons isolate themselves in a musical world of only traditional Breton dance, song and sonneurs, note that over two-thirds of the festivals listed feature rock music and world musics of many styles. I have added websites so you can explore!

But, there seems to be at least one major festival missing from this list: the Festival de Cornouaille held for 5 days in Quimper in July (festival-cornouaille.bzh). This year the festival marks its 100th anniversary and each year some 250,000 visitors attend. Not sure why this festival is not on the list below, but perhaps its free events attract far more people than the concerts and events with paid entries.

1. **Vieilles Charrues** in Carhaix (5 days): 273,000 festival attendees (vieillescharrues.assoc.fr)
2. **Festival Interceltique de Lorient** (10 days): 165,000 paid entries (festival-interceltique.bzh)
3. **Chant Marin** in Paimpol (3 days): 100,000 (paimpol-festival.bzh)
4. **Le Bout du Monde** à Crozon (3 days): 60,000 (festivaluboutdumonde.com)
5. **Roi Arthur** in Bréal-sous-Montfort (3 days): 60,000 (festivalduroiartthur.fr)
6. **Motocultur** in Carhaix (4 days): 54,000 – rock (motocultur-festival.com)
7. **Fête du Bruit de Landerneau** (3 days): 53 000 (landerneau.festival-fetedubruit.com)
8. **Fête du Bruit de Saint-Nolff** (3 days): 53,000 (stnolff.festival-fetedubruit.com)
9. **Art Rock** in Saint-Brieuc (3 days): 45,000 paid entries (85 000 people in all) (artrock.org)
10. **Festival Bobital L'Armor à Sons** in Bobital (3 days): 45,000 (bobital-festival.fr)
11. **No Logo** in Saint-Père-Marc-en-Poulet (4 days): 42,000 (nologobzh.com)
12. **Festidreuz** in Fouesnant: 30,000 (festidreuz.fr)
13. **Au Pont du Rock** in Malestroit (2 days): 26,500 (aupontdurock.com)
14. **Galettes du Monde** in Saint-Anne d'Auray (2 days): 20,000 (festivalgalettesdumond.fr)
15. **La Route du Rock** in Saint-Malo (4 days): 18,000 (laroutedurock.com)
16. **Astropolis** in the woods of Keroual (5 days): 17,000 (astropolis.org)

Heard of, but not heard – 9 New Recordings from Brittany

Notes for these albums are drawn from *Musique Bretonne* 275 (April-May-June 2023) and *Ar Men* 255 (July-August 2023) & 256 (Sept-Oct. 2023) as well as the Coop Breizh website and other website sources.



Cécile Corbel & Laurent Tixier, *La fille du Verseau*. Label En Phase ENP 011

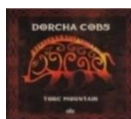
Breton singer and harpist Cécile Corbel pairs here with Laurent Tixier, composer from the Vendée for an album evoking a world of mythology, history as well as contemporary concerns. They are joined by a rich mix of musicians who bring percussions, fiddles, oud, guitars, bombard and cello as well as a choir of voices.



Dièse 3 & Yann Fañch Kemener. *Amzer*.

Musique Têtues CMT-422788.

The performance called “Amzer” was created in 2009 and incorporates the voice of Yann Fañch Kemener (deceased in 2019), cello of Aldo Ripoché and the three musicians of Dièse 3: Étienne Cabaret on clarinets, Pierre Droual on violin, and Antoine Lahay on electric guitar. The performance focuses on gwerzioù (ballads in the Breton language) and traditional marches of Central Brittany and the Vannetais. The 2012 recording now released adds bass fiddle of Dylan James and percussion of Jean-Marie Nivaigne.



Dorcha Cobs. *Torc Mountain*. Aztec

Musique CM2002

Formed in 2021 this is a duo fusing rock music with Celtic melodies and rhythms.

Topher Loudon on electric guitar is originally from Belfast but has been a part of the Breton rock scene for many years. Anthony Musselin plays both Scottish style pipes (in the Breton bagad) and here features uilleann pipes. The album includes 10 compositions – songs and instrumental arrangements of a folk-rock style. Also joining are musicians Ronan Rouxel (violin and mandolin), Hervé Batteux (drums) and Olivier Achard (bass).



Fredj. *Carnet de notes (à l'Hôtel de la Grève)*.

This release includes 16 compositions by pianist and singer Frédéric Bourgeois (Fredj) of a cinemagraphic nature with jazz, soul, folk and Afro-Brazilian influences. He is accompanied by Simon Mary on bass fiddle and Bernard Le Dréau on saxophones.



Gloaguen-Le Hénaff. *Kerne Vodez*.

This is a duo of Tristan Gloaguen on sax and vocals and Hyacinthe Le Hénaff on accordion with 12 selections of songs and dances from the tradition of the Kerneveodez and Brasparts/Saint Rivoal areas of central western Brittany. They are joined by Gilles LeGoff (on vocals) and Malo Kerver on cittern.



Maciuca-Robert-Mary. *Patience Infuse*.

Alla Coda Productions AC01.

This is a trio of Ronan Robert on accordion, Marian Iocob Maciuca on violin and Simon Mary on bass fiddle with melodies and rhythms of Romanian inspiration with an influence of dances rhythms one would find at a fest noz and musette style.



Menace d'Éclaircie. *Les étoiles du rock'n roll*. Klam Records KR 15.

This group was formed in 2008 and is described as a combination of brass band

and rock & roll, with inspiration in Breton music. They often perform as a street band. Members are: Nicolas Châtelet (bass sax), Thomas Lotout (biniou and bombard), Youenn Paranthoën (vocals and accordion), Jean-Marie Stephant (percussion) and Kerien Portebois (guitar).



Jean-Luc Thomas & Gab Faure. *Gwiad*.

Hirustica HR 260283.

Flute player Jean-Luc Thomas pairs with the violin of Gab Faure to bring their long experience of world music to their interpretation of Breton and Irish music.



Trio Hervieux Mahé. *La Sauveur des âmes – Salver an eleanor*.

This recording includes 11 selection of songs evoking the pleasures of youth and regrets of old age drawn from the Vannetais area of Morbihan where both Breton and Gallo are spoken. The trio of Gilbert Hervieux and son Wenceslas Hervieux and Dominique Mahé combines bombard, organ, biniou and song,

Recommended Reading from Breizh Amerika

Breizh-amerika.com/blog

It was not that many years ago that one had to search very diligently to find information in the English language about Brittany. This is definitely changing. The Breizh Amerika Blog has featured some very interesting articles in English which provide an excellent introduction to Brittany:

“Exploring the Celtic Traditions of Samhain: A Comprehensive Guide” published on the blog on September 2. This gives an overview of what is commonly known as “Halloween” in the U.S. Samhain has interesting roots in Celtic traditions.

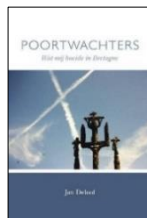
“Discovering the Breton Language: A Glimpse into a Rich Celtic Heritage” published August 20. An in-depth look at the history of the Breton language, its comparison to other Celtic languages, its current state and statistics and resources for learning it.

“Discovering Brittany, France: Navigating the Region through Detailed Maps” published August 18. An article loaded with maps of different kinds showing history, the different “pays,” presence of the Breton language, cities, tourist sites, train and road routes, and even a map showing the density of creperies in France where Brittany definitely shows a strong presence.

New Books of Note

Jan Deloof. *Poortwachters*. Boekscout publishers (boekscout.nl), 2021. 130 pages.

Noted by Lois Kuter with thanks to Tugdual Kalvez for information



Jan Deloof (born 1930) has long served as a representative for the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language in Belgium. He is a Flemish poet and writer who has learned the Breton language and has published several books to present Breton authors to Dutch-speakers (in Flemish Belgium,

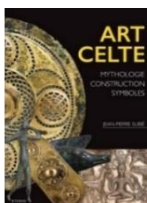
Netherlands and South Africa). He has recently published a book called *Poortwachters* (Door keepers) which presents Breton language writers which have particularly inspired him with extracts from their work as well as numerous photographs. These include Tugdual Kalvez who has collaborated with him since 1977, Gwennole Ar Menn and Garmenig Ihuelou, Yann Bouëssel du Bourg, Goulven Jacq, Jean Le Du, Naig Rozmor, Reun ar C’halan, Roger Laouenan, Jules Gros, Lukian Kergoat, and Martial Menard.

Previous works by Jan Deloof include:

Bretanje is weer poëzie, with Tugdual Kalvez. De Bladen voor de Poëzie / Orion-Colibrant, 1981. 171 pages. (translations into Dutch of works by 25 Breton poets)

Verhalen van het eind van de wereld – Kortkunst uit Bretagne. Kruispunt 117, September 1988. 218 pages. (a presentation of 19 Breton authors and their work)

Ik heb geen ander land – N'em eus lec'h all ebet. Kruispunt 174, 1998. 377 pages. (original Breton texts with Dutch translations of 32 Breton poets).



Jean-Pierre Subié. *Art Celte : Mythologie-Construction-Symboles*. Yoran Embanner, 2023. 221 pages. ISBN 978-2-36747-096-2.

As the book cover blurb notes, this is not the book of a historian. But you will certainly learn about Celtic history and lore as far back as archeological finds and manuscripts will take you. This is a book by an artist about art and design which provides a knowledge of history and Celtic mythology important in appreciating the art you see.

The space given to photos and drawings far outweighs the space given to text which makes this a book for artists and those who love art. The photographs of statues, pottery, coins, jewelry, torcs, stonework and

other decorative objects are excellent in detail and well documented as to their particular history and current location in museums throughout Europe. I especially appreciated the many pen and ink drawings by Subié to bring out details not so easily spotted in photographs. These are especially interesting for any aspiring artist who might want to try their hand at adopting design elements in new creations.

When one thinks of Celtic art, the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages like the Book of Kells probably come to mind first for many people. These are indeed magnificent and they are given a few pages in this book. But it is the less known art of the pre-Christian period, going back to 1500 BC that are featured in this book.

The book is divided into short chapters focused on a particular topic or type of object – decorated arms, cauldrons, jewelry, pottery, carvings of heads and images of faces, etc. And there are chapters to address symbolism, especially that of animals such as the boar, birds, stags, horses, dragons, or fantastical animals as well as plants. And the author also addresses the significance of numbers and how they are represented, including a concise introduction to one of the best known symbols in Brittany, the triskel (which is by no means unique to the Celts).

Jean-Pierre Subié is an artist, photographer and calligrapher and all those talents are evident in this book. You will find a few of his paintings as well as the many drawings detailing Celtic design in the book. He is certainly also an enthusiastic scholar of Celtic art and history. He is a member of the Archeology Section of the Cultural Institute of Brittany as well as the Association for the Research and Preservation of Archeological Sites of Trégor. He teaches art and calligraphy and shares his knowledge of Celtic art as a speaker in schools and for organizations.

Enjoy this book especially for the beauty of the photography and drawings, as well as for the introduction to elements of Celtic art provided by Subié's in his text.



**Bretagne / Amérique du Nord –
Échanges transatlantiques.**

Directed by Zélie Guével, Anne Hellegouarc'h, Gaëlle Le Corre, Jean-Yves Le Disez. Éditions du CRBC, 2023. 321 pages. ISBN 979-10-92331-60-8.

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

As presented in *Bro Nevez* 158 (June 2021) this publication is the fruit of a conference held June 8 and 9, 2021 on exchanges between Brittany and North

America. It is part of a publication series by the Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique of the Université de Bretagne occidentale (Brest) called Kreiz. The papers published are from conferences gathering sociologists, ethnologists, historians and specialists of language and literature. See www.univ-brest.fr/crbc for information.

Articles in this new 2023 publication are quite diverse in topic – all interesting in giving insight into the impact of Bretons on the U.S. and Canada and vice versa. Most articles have a focus on a particular individual. The literary world was well represented with the following articles:

Cécile Beaudoin, "*Quelque chose de neuf et de bienvenu*": *Louis Hémon au Canada ou le goût de l'aventure*

Presentation of Louis Hémon (1880-1913) and his celebration of the Canadian wilderness with his well known book *Marie Chapdelain* published in 1921 and widely translated.

Sophie Gondolle, *Marie Le Franc: une Bretonne à la plume québécoise*

The books of Marie Le Franc (1879-1965) are inspired by the Canadian wilderness as well as the maritime world of her native Brittany.

Stéphanie Noirard, *Quelques notes bleues dans un cantique: Xavier Grall sur la route de Jack Kerouac*

An analysis of the writing of Xavier Grall (1930-1981) and its inspiration from the works of Jack Kerouac and American blues.

Virginie Podvin, *Alain Robbe-Grillet, un Brestois à New York*

Travel of Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922-2008) from his native city of Brest to New York and the development of the "new novel."

Zélie Guével, *Alexis Gloaguen et Paol Keineg : deux écrivains bretons en Amérique du Nord*

Presentation of views of the U.S. and Canada in the writing of Paol Keineg and Alexis Gloaguen who lived in and traveled in North America.

Other individuals also profiled:

Zélie Guével and Alexandra Hillinger, "*Je me souviens*": *le Breton Olivier Le Tardif, interprète et administrateur en Nouvelle-France*

Role of Olivier Le Tardif (1601-1665) in the colonization of Quebec and memorials of him today.

Philippe Argouarch, *Joseph-Yves Limantour (1812-1885)*

Adventures in the American west and Mexico by Joseph-Yves Limantour who would acquire vast land

holdings, including much of what is San Francisco today.

Axel Klein, *La Bretagne dans la vie et la musique de Swan Hennessy (1866-1929)*

Swan Hennessy was an American composer with Irish roots who was adopted into the Association of Breton Composers in recognition of his Celtic roots. His classical compositions would be inspired by his time in Brittany.

With a focus on Bretons in Canada:

Grégory Moign, *Bretons de Montréal : les nouveaux autochtones*

A look at a small group of Bretons in Montreal constructing a Breton identity based on their efforts to learn the Breton language.

Linda Guidroux, "Pourquoi et comment se dire breton au Québec?"

A sample of some 35 people of Breton origin living in Quebec to explore their sense of identity and attachment to Brittany.

Jean-Pierre Pichette, *La sanction de l'ainé célibataire entre Shakespeare et l'Amérique: explorer la filière bretonne*

A look at the possible Breton origins of wedding customs related to the older unmarried siblings of those being married.

Three articles focused on the presence of American soldiers in Brest during World War I

Alain Michel Abarnou, *La présence américaine à Brest en 1919 selon The Pontanezen Duckboard et la presse locale*

A look at the interactions (and lack of them) between the local population of Brest and American soldiers at Camp Pontanézen (some 800,000 passing through) as depicted in the Pontanezan Duckboard camp publication and newspapers of Brest.

Benoit Quinquis, *Les Américains à Brest en 1917 : comment les mythes nous racontent*

Erwan Le Gall, *Les USA, la Grand Guerre et la Bretagne : bilan d'un centenaire et perspectives*

Both articles focused on the centenary commemoration of the American presence in Brest in World War I and how this perpetuated some stereotypes and misconceptions

Three articles presented aspects of relations between Brittany and the USA:

Sébastien Carney, *De Wilson à Beyoncé: l'Amérique des nationalistes bretons*

A look at changing attitudes – positive and negative – towards the U.S. and Canada on the part of Breton nationalists who identified with Indigenous peoples of North America as fellow dominated peoples fighting for sovereignty. On a more positive note the U.S. and Canada were also viewed as models of federalism vs. oppressiveness of France.

Maire-Clémentine Corvest, *L'affaire Amoco Cadiz (1978-1992), De Portsall à Chicago: asymétries, incompatibilités et incommunications territoriales.*

A look at the organization of a union of Breton leaders in the wake of the 1978 Amoco Cadiz oil spill on the coast of northern Brittany. The leaders took Standard Oil to court and traveled to Chicago for proceedings. The article compares the legal systems of the U.S. and France as well as international law.

Eric Beaty, *Interaction et relations économiques entre la Bretagne et les Etats-Unis d'Amérique : dynamisme et discrétion*

A short but very informative presentation of the Consulate of the United States in Brittany. This was created in 2000 as a branch of the U.S. Embassy to maintain good economic, public, political and cultural ties between the US. and Brittany. The Consulate fosters the export of American goods to Brittany and Breton goods to America and it also assists in the establishment of Breton businesses in the U.S. and American companies in Brittany.

And last but not least the article by Fañch Broudic, *Bro Nevez: le titre breton d'une lettre d'information américaine*

On May 18 and then again on the 26th, 2021, Fañch Broudic contacted me with a slew of questions about myself, *Bro Nevez*, and the ICDBL which I dutifully answered. I also provided an index I had created to 150 issues of *Bro Nevez* and 159 issues were available online on the icdbl.org website. With the conference scheduled for June 8 and 9, however, time was limited for the preparation of a presentation on the history of *Bro Nevez*.

I have to admit being disappointed by Broudic's article published in the conference proceedings. I perceived – perhaps wrongly – a rather negative tone. I, as the now main author of articles, was faulted for the limited sources of information I draw from, and especially for not consulting sociolinguistic research. I could offer lots of excuses for this – having full-time jobs outside of the academic world totally unrelated to anything Breton? Lacking time in the evenings and on weekends to scour the internet to discover publications I did not know existed?

There seemed to be a tone of rebuke on the part of Broudic in noting that *Bro Nevez* was a mirror of the

Emsav. What else would one expect from a publication by an organization called the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language? *Bro Nevez* is a newsletter to report on work in Brittany to promote the future of the Breton language and introduce Americans (English language readers) to a range of basic topics. It is harder than one might think to find any information about Brittany on this side of the Atlantic. I have always counted on the generosity of Bretons who sent news, newspaper clippings, newsletters, or magazines in exchange for *Bro Nevez*, or books and music recordings for reviews in *Bro Nevez*. Most of these happened to be people active in the Emsav and not people publishing university studies.

Bro Nevez was also faulted for its boring layout and lack of visual interest. I do plead guilty to that.

These are little things and perhaps I am too sensitive about Broudic's analysis. Most of his presentation of *Bro Nevez* was generally positive and right on target. But, I was surprised by what seemed a strange statistical breakdown of both the authors of *Bro Nevez* articles and themes addressed. These numbers seemed to be based on a selective count of items in the index of 150 *Bro Nevez* issues.

Because I was surprised by the statistics presented, I went back through all 150 issues of *Bro Nevez* to look at how much *space* was contributed by a particular author or devoted to a particular topic, by adding up the number of pages, half-pages and quarter-pages. This was tedious but looking at space seemed a more honest assessment of content. See also my presentation of *Bro Nevez* in issue 159 (September 2021).

Let's start with the statistics for authors contributing articles. Fañch Broudic selected just seven individuals who seemed most active. A pie chart shows a breakdown of the contributions by just these seven:

Lois Kuter	83%
Reun ar C'halan	7%
Natalie Novik	3%
Jean-Pierre Le Mat	3%
Anne Habermehl	2%
Lenora Timm	1%
Jay O'Callahan	1%

In looking at page space for these contributors I came up with similar results to Broudic's percentages, except for the percentage for Lois Kuter.

Reun ar C'halan	2%
Natalie Novik	3%
Jean-Pierre Le Mat	3%
Anne Habermehl	0.03%
Lenora Timm	0.05%

Jay O'Callahan 0.07%

As noted by Broudic, the amount of content contributed to authors varied by the number of years they were actively part of the U.S. ICDBL and able to write an article or note.

I also looked at contributions by six other U.S. ICDBL Members (10 to 25 pages of material) and these ranged from 0.02% to 0.06% for Kevin Rottet, Laurie Fadave, Amy Varin, Paul Nedwell, Mary Turner and Greg Stump for a total of 2.5%.

27 other U.S. ICDBL members made occasional contributions adding up to 3% / 23 other non-ICDBL individuals added 1% of contributions / Contributions from individuals in Brittany, the Celtic countries and ICDBL branches added 2%.

Bro Nevez has included a number of texts reproduced from 19th and 20th century travel accounts. Excluding the very brief introductions by Lois Kuter, these added up to 6%

Reproductions of newspaper articles, catalogs and brochures added up to 7% of pages.

And the cover pages and standard introductory blurb for each issue added up to 2% (at least).

When you take out the 33% of writing not attributable to Lois Kuter that leaves 66%. This is still a big majority of *Bro Nevez* contributions, but not 83% as implied by Broudic's pie-chart. Many of my contributions are translations of articles, press releases, or website information which I did not write. Still as editor I am responsible for the selection of materials even if I did not create them.

The statistical analysis of content was even more puzzling to me in the impression it must leave with readers of Broudic's article.

Although Broudic did mention the range of topics covered in *Bro Nevez*, and he cautioned that the pie chart showing the percentage of each of the five themes he selected was not meant to represent all content of *Bro Nevez*, it left a peculiar idea of the weight given to these particular themes. At best this pie chart was meaningless; at worst it was deceptive in presenting the content of *Bro Nevez*.

The pie chart showed that 12% of the five themes selected by Broudic were about the "Breton language", 4% about Diwan, 26% presented books and new publications, 54% about music, and 4% were articles whose titles (content?) included the word "Brezhoneg." That last theme is especially mystifying - it would include articles and short notes about "Stourm ar

Brezhoneg,” “Ofis ar Brezhoneg,” “Kuzul ar Brezhoneg,” the “Ya d’ar Brezhoneg” campaign and a number of other organizations or events with “Brezhoneg” in their name that I might have included in a title. Why could that be considered a “theme” of *Bro Nevez*?

Because I found these percentages misleading in how those reading the article would perceive the content of *Bro Nevez* I did a deeper dive into the pages of all 150 issues indexed to see how much space was devoted to topics like book reviews and notes, music, and Diwan. While I did not measure words, I could get a fairly accurate look at how many pages, half-pages or quarter-pages of the total were devoted to these topics.

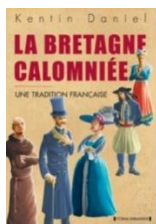
Here’s my breakdown:

Music (presented as 54% of *Bro Nevez* content in Broudic’s selection of themes) included articles about musicians, reviews and notes about recordings, interviews with musicians, festival listings, etc. This made up 23% of space in *Bro Nevez*. While Broudic noted that 3/4ths (75%) of the content on music was to be found in the “Heard of but not Heard” short notes about new releases, this in fact made up just 18% of the content about music.

Book reviews and notes (presented as 26% of the five themes) - Book reviews make up 9% of *Bro Nevez* page space and short notes about books made up 2%. Notes about journals and magazines made up 0.012% and presentations of publishers made up 0.025%. Adding all those up you get, less than 12% of *Bro Nevez* space.

Diwan (presented as 4% of theme content). - In the 1980s and 90s Diwan was given considerable coverage in *Bro Nevez*, but overall the space devoted to Diwan amounts to 0.6% of the 150 issues of *Bro Nevez* that were indexed. This does not include mention of Diwan in articles that also present bilingual schools and statistics on Breton in education. That might bring space devoted to Diwan up to 1%.

So, there’s my response to this article, which some might consider a bit of an irrational rant.



Kentin Daniel, *La Bretagne Calomniée – Une tradition française*. Yoran Embanner, 2023. 247 pages. ISBN978-2-36785-061-0.

Reviewed by Lois Kuter

In the introduction to this book, the author Kentin Daniel explains that a calumny – oral or written – is a process based on a false accusation which attacks the reputation and honor of an individual

or group. Other words that come to mind are slander, defamation, malignment and character assassination.

This book documents in detail the long history of such depictions of Bretons and their language and culture by French elites – writers, politicians, clergy, and others in positions of power. Bretons have not been the only conquered people reduced in image to the status of ignorant savage in order to justify domination and cultural genocide.

The history of negative depictions of Brittany and Bretons is a long one and the author starts with the arrival of the Franks in the 4th century. Ecclesiastical writings and chronicles from the 4th through 11th centuries carry along a string of depictions of Bretons as barbarians. Throughout the Middle Ages Bretons continue to be depicted as ignorant and uncivilized with a crude language, Breton. The French Revolution of 1789 opened the door to insults of the uncivilized peoples in France who spoke backward languages other than French. In the 19th century the negative accounts of Bretons explode – especially of the Breton language – as those in power make a commitment to bring a sense of citizenship and civilization (= French language and culture) to Brittany.

The author is careful to explain the meaning of words used to characterize Bretons in the context of their historical times and as the book moves through time, the history of a particular period is presented. While the stereotypes change some through the ages, they mostly just accumulate with newer ones added to previous ones. Bretons are thus characterized as savages, akin to Indians of North America, wild animals, alcoholics, uncivilized, ignorant, unlettered, superstitious, rude, coarse, dirty and behind the times. They are also considered thieves, sly in dealing, insolent, fanatics, stubborn, head-strong, and somber. Women are characterized as easy; men as lazy idlers. The Breton language is rude and lacks a literature, and of course it blocks the Breton from the refinement of French culture.

The book provides a horrifying litany of insults heaped upon Bretons and the Breton language especially. Not only do the insults grow from the beginning of French contact with Brittany, but while receding a bit in the 21st century the author cites many examples of how they are still very much present in writing and media. One only needs to look to the recent revival of interest in the character Becassine in publications and movies as an example.

As Bretons have become proud of their identity in more recent decades, it is important to understand the history of all the obstacles that have been put in place to erase the Breton language and culture. It is almost miraculous

that Brittany retains its rich cultural heritage. Thank goodness Bretons are stubborn!

American Travelers and Breton Character Assassination

Both American and English tourists went to Brittany in search of picturesque landscapes. Their description of towns and cities focused on monuments – castles and churches, dolmens, the older the better – and travel accounts discussed historical events related to these. Tourists were also attracted to the Pardons where a display of costume was to be expected. Travel guides often included lists of pardons with this in mind.

Comments in American travel accounts are a mix of positive and negative – thickly wooded somber landscapes, charming views, old-fashioned towns with narrow streets, monstrous rocks!

Costumes were often noted in some detail and admired even if they were seen as relics from the past. People's physical appearance was also included in some travel accounts - often to note the ugliness of men or women, but sometimes also their beauty.

It is difficult to trace sources that Americans might have used to learn about Brittany but the magazine and books by English travel writers were no doubt an influence. And some English language translations of Breton writers were probably consulted. These could have included the following:

Hersart de la Villemarqué, *Barzaz Breiz*, which was translated by Tom Taylor as *Ballads and Songs of Brittany*. Excerpts from this are to be found in popular magazines in the 1840s to 1870s. Travel accounts of weddings and discussion of wedding customs seem to often draw from this rather than being actual eye-witness accounts by English or American writers.

Anatole Le Braz, *The Land of Pardons*, 1906. Anatole Le Braz made seven trips for speaking tours in the U.S. from 1906 to 1920. He was well acquainted with Ange Mosher who would publish *The Spell of Brittany* in 1920.

Emile Souvestre (1806-1854) authored many collections of Breton tales and legends which were translated into English. These often made their way into English and American accounts of Brittany.

These sources would not have passed along many negative observations about Breton character and appearance, but would have confirmed writers' views that Bretons were a people of the past who clung to old traditions and superstitions.

The travel accounts of the 1800s tend to be more negative than those of the 1900s. By the second half of the 20th century – 1950s, 60s and beyond, travel writing by Americans in magazines and newspapers still highlighted pardons, costumes, old houses and castles, and there is a continued fascination with the wild coastal scenery as well as megaliths and anything considered ancient by American standards. The word "backward" is only rarely found. Brittany is described as "rugged," "rustic," "romantic," and a land of mystery. You no longer read of "peasants," but of "farmers." A strong focus is given to food, restaurants and hotels, with seafood highlighted especially.

The following excerpts from American travel accounts present some of the same timeless insults that Kentin Daniel presents in his book, *La Bretagne Calomniée* reviewed above.

George Wharton Edwards in *Brittany and the Bretons*, 1910, summarizes perfectly the themes found throughout American travel writings: *Brittany; land of granite, of mighty oaks and of druidical remains; land of silence entwined with wild briar; of rocky moorland and wooded dark heights, rent by vast chasms and watered by silvery trout-filled stream; land of a terrible coast, dotted with mysterious celtic sphinxes; land of Calvaries, of dolmen, of cromlechs and alignments or Druidical menhirs; land of pardons and of peasants who pride themselves upon their ignorance of the French language; land of poetry and romance of the middle ages.*

On the theme of Brittany, backwater of a modern world:

The Basse-Bretagne – particularly about Carhaix – with its inland restrictiveness is, even now, inhabited by a folk a hundred years behind the times in ideas, prejudices and customs. Their piety is marred by secret superstitions or by openly heathen impulses; practices harking back to the Druidic epoch. (Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson. "Around Brittany," *The Chatauquan*, Vol. 31, no. 3, June 1900)

At times all Brittany seems an anachronism and one wonders that the tri-couleur flies over these people, the last in France to yield to union, a folk who seem to have stepped from the pages of medieval history or to have strayed from a scene of opera Bouffe. (Margaret Lathrop Law "Welcoming spring in Brittany" *Travel*, Vol. 52, no. 6, April 1929)

Because the busy movement of modern trade finds no use for, or need of, this peripheral, little-producing land and its simple, backward people, changes have come slowly here, and folk-survivals are common. It is only in such backwaters of a modern world for instance that women still wear the identical dress and gargantuan,

inexplicable head-gear of long-past generations, centuries even. (Harold S. Kemp, "Brittany: The Backward Child of a Stern Environment," *The Journal of Geography*, Vol. XXIX, no. 6, September 1930)
On the theme of Breton character

Visit to Kersaliou en route to St. Pol from the "quaint old town of Roscoff": *The kind-hearted inhabitants of Kersaliou were true Bretons, conservative, religious, hospitable and industrious.* (Jesse Walker Fewkes, "A Corner of Brittany," *American Naturalist* Vol. 23, 1889)

Allowing for the dissimilarities in now one and another locale, here prevail a physical type less beautiful, vigorous without refinement, and natures that are obstinate, secretive, ungenial and gloomy. While to be hospitable is felt to be virtuous, the stranger is not welcomed as in Normandy or Touraine; and interest in him is a sober duty rather than an impulse. (Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson, "Around Brittany," *The Chataouquan*, Vol. 31, no. 3, June 1900)

As a race, the Breton may be well summed up as follows: they are descendants of the men of a primitive epoch, from whom they inherit traits which even time has not entirely eradicated. Their intuitions are correct, and their convictions profound; their will tenacious, and their energies equal to all that may be demanded of them. They are proud, truthful, courageous, intrepid, hospitable, and religious. (Francis Miltoun, *Rambles in Brittany*, Boston: L.C. Page & Co., 1906)

The Breton is hard-headed, obstinate to the last degree, and will resist to the death any attempt to alter his creed or customs ... The Breton peasant is hospitable – when he knows you, or you have been vouched for by someone he knows. (George Wharton Edwards, *Brittany and the Bretons*, 1910)

An aloof, remote, proud and stubborn man, The Breton, only half guessing the likeness of the outer world, and not well liking that half. ... (Harold S. Kemp, "Brittany: the Backward Child of a Stern Environment," *The Journal of Geography*, Vol. XXIX, no. 6, September 1930)

Brittany's isolation is temperamental as well as physical ... The isolated position of the region is blamed for Brittany's fierce independence, which often reaches the point of truculence. Isolation and an everlasting struggle with sea and soil have left their mark on Bretons tight, thin lips and in their ice-blue eyes. Their faces, as brown and creased as walnuts, seem scarcely more animated. Poverty and drabness are reflected in Breton backwardness, often taken for Old World charm. (Allen Chellas, "Village in Brittany," *Holiday* Vol. 7, no. 1, June 1950)

Haunting is a word frequently used to describe the Breton landscape. This is a spare country, austere for the most part, just as people tend to be frugal, hard-working, insular, tradition-bound, and not particularly

outgoing. ... (in reference to Quimper) *A corner of France is frozen in time, so to speak.* (Helmut and Gea Koenig, "Brittany," *Travel* 142(3), September 1974)

On the theme of Breton physical appearance

One of the most negative descriptions encountered, this also addresses character: *In passing thorough a crooked streeted, thatch-roofed, musty-looking old Breton village, one observes, first of all, the women; what a tough, hardy, baked look they have, and the quaint costumes with this they adorn themselves! They are as brown and brawny as the Welsh farmer's lass; not so brisk however. Their faces are too often blank expressions of rugged flesh. The expression is essentially animal, hardly a spark of human intelligence lighting them, not even, alas!, when they smile. If you, perchance, have a smattering of the Breton patois, and talk to them, you will find that, beyond their immediate work, their excessive superstition, and their blind reverence for the priest, they know absolutely nothing.* (G. M. Towle, "Life in Brittany II: The Breton Peasants – Their Traditions and Customs. *Harper's New Monthly*, Vol. 42, No. 247, December 1870). Towle was graduate of Yale and Harvard and served as a U.S. Consul in Nantes 1866-68.

Pont l'Abbé: Here one is in the very midst of the strange Bigouden country, famed for its remarkably ugly women and curious costumes ... From Pont l'Abbé to Guilvinec, and from Saint Guénolé to Loctudy, will be found a strange population of almost Mongolian aspect and characteristics, who retain their costumes and customs with jealous care, mixing little with the Bretons, and then only when driven by necessity. Descendants of a wandering primitive horde, they were cast up here by the Atlantic in a storm, and here they have remained. Nowhere else in this populous land will one find so many children; they run in hordes in the narrow streets of the villages and throng the gullies and the rocky recesses of the shore, when they appear and vanish like wild things. Flat of face, and timid as fawns, they lend a certain charm to the desolate landscape (George Wharton Edwards, *Brittany and the Bretons*, 1910)

... We had been attracted by the bizarre costumes and pronounced racial characteristics of the Bigoudenes. Those of the older generations were almost without exception short of stature, sturdy, leather-skinned, with none of the beauty and elegance to be found so frequently in other parts of Brittany. The author goes on to mention theories of Mongolian/Tartar origins. (Amy Oakley, *Enchanted Brittany*, 1930)

On the theme of alcoholism

Men, tall, brown, with long hair falling to their shoulders framing faces of ascetic sternness, simple as children, and loyal and true to their belief – fanatical if you will –

but brave and fearless as lions ... their one and only sin – alcohol. (George Wharton Edwards, *Brittany and the Bretons*, 1910)

To drink unto drunkenness is the inflexible rule at the christening feast; a man is no man who fails in it. ... One of the peasant customs with regard to their children is unpleasant to name, but affords a striking illustration of the degradation in which they live. When a boy reaches his seventh or eighth year, it is the ancient custom to make him drink to intoxication. (G. M. Towle, "Life in Brittany II: The Breton Peasants – Their Traditions and Customs. *Harper's New Monthly*, Vol. 42, No. 247, December 1870). This seems inspired by Olivier Perrin's illustration of this event in *Galerie des Moeurs, Usages et costumes des Bretons de l'Armorique*, 1808 (reprinted in later years). Towle served as a U.S. Consul in Nantes 1866-68. Would he have consulted this book?

... 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. (Ange Mosher, *The Spell of Brittany*, 1920)

Weddings, like fairs, offer such moments of somber, fitful joy. They afford a chance for drinking and dancing with an equal determination applied to tasks. (Margaret Lathrop Law "Welcoming spring in Brittany" *Travel*, Vo. 52, no. 6, April 1929).

A Travel Account of Brittany from 1961

Travel accounts from the 19th and 20th centuries by English and American authors have been a regular feature of *Bro Nevez* since 1991. These often include interesting details about life in Brittany but can be rife with stereotypes and negative characterizations of Bretons – especially 19th century accounts by English travelers. The retelling of Breton history is always very selective and not always accurate.

The following account includes its share of characterizations of Breton people and Brittany more generally – positive and negative. And it includes some observations on the state of the Breton language in the early 1960s and political and cultural action in defense of Breton autonomy. The author, Ernest O. Houser (1910-1997) was a travel writer best known for his guide to Italy as well as articles about World War II.

Ernest O. Houser, "France's Enchanted Corner" *The Saturday Evening Post* 234 (32), August 12, 1961.

Note that a large amount of text briefly describing various towns and cities of Brittany have not been included here in the interest of space.

For hundreds of years the people of Brittany have fiercely resisted any attempts to change their language or customs. Can their beautiful world survive?

... Jutting out from the thickset body of France like a huge groping lobster claw, the Brittany peninsula proves, on acquaintance, a universe all its own – a country rather than a province. Some 170 miles long and 85 miles wide, inhabited by 3,500,000 people, the ancient duchy is distinguished by its own traditions, its own way of life, even a language spoken nowhere else. And though 500,000 French vacationers invade its soft white beaches every July and August, and though the English long ago discovered the attractions of Brittany's mild climate, Americans – with few exceptions – have until now ignored this smiling garden by the sea, within an easy four-hour drive of Paris's western gates.

If your grand European tour leaves you with a few days to spare and if you are looking for the beautiful and the unspoiled, you might have a look at Brittany. Your first reaction, as you get past Rennes, the rather dull regional capital, is a strong impulse to relax. Here, at long last, you have reached a land unmarred by the machine age. There are few factories. Paris-Brest air service started only last year. Television is just coming in, the latest novelty. Life moves with the slow, peaceful rhythm of the age of our grandparents. And while the Bretons may consider their poor and backward province the stepchild of the French Republic, the visitor from more advanced parts of the globe delights in its unworldliness.

Moreover, you still get your money's worth. A room for two will cost around eight dollars in a good hotel, and a square meal, about two dollars a head. Breton food is straightforward and – we are in France – extremely tasty. Fish, lobster, crab and oyster emerge from the surrounding sea, and trout and salmon from the streams and rivers, to please your palate. Great hunks of lemon-yellow butter are placed on your table as soon as you pull up your chair. And if you are a fancier of crepes, crisp stacks of them may be washed down with cool, dry Muscadet.

... With every step, the personality of Brittany reveals itself. You find it in its hedges and tall oak trees and the gold and white of broom and hawthorn that bloom through the long Breton spring. You sense it in its swiftly moving clouds that made a burst of sunshine double welcome. You feel it in the touch of Brittany in its low farmhouses, its medieval cities and its splendid castles; and in its unpretentious country churches whose ceiling, painted blue and gold, seem bits of starlit sky. But most of all, you find it in its people.

Who are they and where did they come from? Although some experts claim that they can spot the Bretons in any Paris subway train, the truth is that they look

surprisingly like run-of-the-mill Frenchmen. Their faces weather well, and many of the older people resemble their own gray, weather-beaten granite houses. As old-world history goes, the Bretons are newcomers to these parts. Their ancestors, Celts from the British Isles, arrived here in a steady trickle from the fifth century onward – chased from their homes by the fierce Saxon conquerors.

They called the country, then known as Armor – land by the sea – “Little Britain,” which later became Bretagne, or Brittany. Supplanting the barbaric, tribal setup that had existed here since the decay of Roman power, they found themselves involved in endless warfare with their ambitious neighbors to the east, the Normans. Constituted as a sovereign duchy in the ninth century, Brittany played her part in the eternal feuds and rivalries of Europe. Her proud heraldic symbol, the ermine, inspired awe in many a great army. Of the heroic figures clattering across the Breton stage, the last – and best known – is the much-wooed Duchess Anne, whose successive marriages to two French kings spelled, in effect, the end of Breton independence. It was Anne’s daughter, Claude, who, in 1532, gave in at last and ceded the unvanquished duchy to the French crown.

But Celts never say die. Wherever you encounter them – and other branches of the family today inhabit Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Cornwall – you’ll find them clinging to their own characteristic traits with a death-defying will. True to themselves through the vicissitudes of centuries, the Bretons have refused to give up their identity. When, in 1932, the regional capital of Rennes was set to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the duchy’s integration into the French realm, a fine bronze monument showing Brittany on her knees before France blew up with a big bang. The Bretons who had planted the bomb were never found.

“Remember,” you are told, “we are a nation. Even after the French took us in tow, there was a Breton parliament at Rennes. It is only since Napoleon’s days that Paris has attempted to turn us into Frenchmen.”

Obstinacy is perhaps the Breton’s best-know trait. “Stubborn as a Breton,” is the French approximation of what we mean by a Missouri mule. But there is far more to the Breton character than stubbornness. For one thing, a mystic streak in the Bretons finds expression in the region’s many legends and shines through, occasionally, with the glimmer of a long-forgotten past. The little country chapel, charmingly set in the Breton landscape, may be a Christian substitute for a druidic shrine. The village feast may have its origin in some old pagan ritual. And the curious cult of living water that still makes many a fountain an object of popular reverence predates, most probably, Christianity. This ancient patrimony, lodged deeply in the Breton soul, does not

detract from Christian piety – on the contrary, Brittany is considered one of the most Catholic regions of France.

Being Celts, Bretons tend to be moody. Much like their Irish cousins, they have their ups and downs, shifting from joy to melancholy and back again without apparent rhyme or reason. The bleaker moods, however, set the tone. Life in these simple stone houses lends itself well to introspection. As you survey a given section of farming country, you will see that neighbor lives as far away from neighbor as possible. Loneliness is not considered a suffering in these parts.

The average Breton shares the small farmer’s universal distrust of outsiders. Do not lose heart if he receives you without a smile. Less than an hour later when you have managed to establish confidence, smiles will be broken out along with the tall bottle of homemade cider. Once he has left his shell, the Breton gives himself completely, and you can trust him all the way. The stranger touring Brittany is not exposed to the kind of fleecing he might expect in other parts of *la belle* France.

It’s true, the Normans and the French have pushed the Bretons back against the wall. Only when you have crossed the waist of the peninsula – a line, roughly, running from Saint-Brieuc to Vanes – into western or “Lower” Brittany, will you hear Breton spoken as a matter of course. It is a pleasant-sounding language for all its harshness – and being Celtic, a far cry from French or any other Romance tongue. More than 300,000 people still use Breton around the clock. Nearly 1,000,000 can reply in kind when spoken to in their old language.

But how much longer until Breton will join Sanskrit and Latin in the dustbin of dead languages? “Breton has not been taught in our schools,” I was told by a high-spirited Breton woman, “since the French public-school system was introduced here in the Eighteen-seventies. Until quite recently, a child speaking Breton in school, even during recess, was persecuted. I know, because when I was twelve years old, I once used inadvertently the Breton word for beech tree and, as a punishment, had to wear the sabot – a miniature wooden clog – around my neck. And to think that the teacher herself was a Breton!”

“France,” my indignant friend continued, “is centralization-happy. There is no balance here between capital and country, no give and take as under your federal system. Paris is it. There has been such a flood of propaganda against our native tongue that, even if it weren’t for the schools, the military service and the radio, our language would be fighting for its life today. Parents no longer like to speak it with their children – why stigmatize them for life as rustics and handicap them in their careers?”

I had seen enough to know that she was right. Even in the more isolated villages of Lower Brittany it was the old people who still used Breton as daily currency. Even they, as a rule, were bilingual. In one out-of-the-way fishing port I overheard a woman speaking Breton with some hard-bitten fishermen from whom she bought some lobsters, then saw her turning around to address her well-groomed dog in French.

The dissipation of the Breton heritage applies even more to the native garb. For 100 years or so the region has been famous for its colorful variety of native costumes – as many as sixty different styles have been identified, some of them limited, like good French wines, to tiny areas or but a single village. Today most of the younger people, understandably, refuse to look “like dressed-up fools,” and you may have to wait for Sunday or a local celebration to see the men in their silver-buttoned jackets, knee breeches and beribboned hats; the women in their pleated skirts, embroidered aprons and lace collars. By far the best-known feminine accessory is the white foot-high, well starched linen *coiffe* which – although merely one of many types of Breton headwear – has achieved status as a Breton trade-mark. A French child spotting this particular decoration on a Paris boulevard will cry, “*Regard, maman, une Bretonne!*”

... The visitor with a taste for the real thing and with a good supply of color film will try to see at least one of Brittany’s glittering pardons – processions held in certain towns at certain dates in honor of a locally beloved saint. The green Michelin guide of Brittany, available in English, gives a good list of them. Often accompanied by feasting and carousing, these typically Breton pageants are getting to be known, alas, all over Europe – reserve your room at the local inn well in advance.

All this is no doubt worth preserving, and some tradition-minded Bretons – most of them teachers and professional men – have tried, these last few years, to inject new life into old Breton folkways. Their effort, though somewhat self-conscious, has met with a good deal of popular response. Numerous “Celtic circles,” scattered through the region, now sponsor folk dances, musical wakes and Celtic jamborees in public squares and farmyards. Hundreds of “sounders,” trained in special schools, enliven these occasions with their melancholy music, playing the Celtic flute and bagpipes [bombarde and bagpipes].

From folkways it is but a tiny step to politics, and we may mention here, in passing, that Brittany has its own brand of nationalism, crystalized in the *Mouvement pour l’Organisation de la Bretagne* – M.O.B. “Centralization crushes us,” I was informed by one of its six leaders, a high-strung young architect from Finistère. “All we ask

is a life of our own, with an elected Breton parliament deciding our own affairs. We are willing to play our part within the structure of a French federation, or, if you will, a federated Europe.” Unfortunately M.O.B.’s precursors, the Breton separatists of World War II, were not always above collaborating with the Germans. Today most inhabitants of Brittany, having far more important worries, shrug off the nationalists as a group of harmless dreamers.

But we have left the reader dangling near the western tip of Brittany, no doubt impatient to be on his way. Should your way lead through Brest, the busy naval base which, during World War II, was a thorn in the side of Allied shipping, take a quick look around. The city of 100,000, nearly wiped out by Allied bombs and shells, has been rebuilt from scratch. Today, thanks to an admirable planning job, it is one of the country’s friendliest, most modern towns. Later, at the old German submarine nests of Lorient and Saint-Nazaire, you will be able to appraise two more impressive samples of French reconstruction.

Now, as you head toward the Pointe du Raz, with which we started our travelogue, slow down and watch the country change around you. The landscape, with its unexpected glimpses of the ocean, with its clear brooks and rolling hills, loses all harshness. Stop at the smiling inland town of Châteaulin to watch the salmon fishing along its tree-lined river quay and look in on nearby Locronan’s splendid, square-cut tower. ...

If northern Brittany was vigorous and a bit rough-around-the-edges, the southern coast is soft and polished and all smiles – the feminine half of this little world. Your headquarters for the next day or two might be Quimper, the handsome capital of Finistère, whose women pride themselves on being as well dressed as their Parisian cousins. The town is famous for its Breton pottery, and it is here that you will shop for souvenirs.

... You have come away with no illusions. For the enchanted world you have explored is going fast. Progress must come to Brittany, and with it all the trappings of an age intolerant of the survival of the quaint. Already, the alarming fact that 20,000 Bretons – most of them young and enterprising people – leave the peninsula every year in search of jobs has called forth several ambitious projects for the industrialization of the backward province. The charm, the quiet, the traditions of the ancient duchy cannot survive much longer. And Brittany, one of these days, may be no more than a mere name printed across a corner of the map of France.

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