

BRO NEVEZ

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



Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué and the Barzaz Breiz
Engraving based on a design by Ernest Boyer found in Barzaz pe gannaouennou Breiz, Paris, 1845.

KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG

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

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Editor's Note

In this issue of *Bro Nevez* you will find a number of pages relating to books about Breton and French history, as well as a presentation of several editions of the famous song collection *Barzhaz Breizh*. Other than the note on the Breton flag (page 12) by Roger Tanguy, I am the author of all notes, book reviews and articles in this issue. Contributions by others would be very welcome for future issues of *Bro Nevez*! - Lois

A New Survey of Breton Language Speakers

The online blog by Fañch Broudic is always full of interesting information about Brittany and the Breton language. In a post of January 24, 2025, (languebretonne.org) he reports on a new survey done in 2024 by the Institut TMO that revealed that only 2.7% of Bretons said they speak the Breton language – 0.8% very well and 1.9% fairly well. This leads to an estimated total of 107,000 Breton speakers. An additional 26% reported knowing only several words or expressions. 71% reported knowing no Breton at all.

This is a major drop in numbers from surveys taken in 2007 and 2018 where for 2007 the total estimated for Breton speakers was 207,000 and for 2018 it was 214,000 - 5% of Bretons each time. While the drop between 2018 and 2024 seems enormous, it is not necessarily surprising since in 2018 it was estimated that 80% of Breton speakers were over the age of 60.

Will the Breton language regain speakers? Valient efforts are being made in schools like the Diwan immersion schools and bilingual programs of the public and private schools to give children an opportunity to master Breton, or at least get started in learning it. Classes for adults have also grown and long-term three and six-month intensive sessions have proven effective in producing competent Breton speakers. But this is a small percentage of the population of Brittany and does not make up for the loss of older generations who used Breton in their homes and everyday lives. Those who learn Breton as a second language are certainly challenged to find opportunities to speak it, and visibility in public life and the media is sadly limited, even if improving.

Should we give up on the future for the Breton language? Hopefully Bretons will continue to fight for a presence for Breton that fosters its use by new generations. There is a lot of creative work being done in publishing and the media, in music and theater, and in Breton language activities for children and adults, but the financial support for all this is always a challenge to find ... as you will read below.

A Victory for Fañch

This February the court of Lorient decided in favor of the use of the tilde ñ for Breton names. Thus the latest baby Fañch born nearly two years ago can keep the ñ officially in his name.

While the Mayor's office of Lorient validated the name Fañch when he was born, the Interior Ministry of France did not grant authorization since ñ is not found in the French alphabet. The parents took the issue to court and this was a win which will hopefully set a precedent for all the Fañch-s to come.

This was certainly not the first case of a denial for Fañch and the c'h in the name Derc'hen was also considered illegal. Well before these recent cases the Le Goarnig family defied rules by giving their children born in the 1950s Breton names: Abraboran, Maiwenn, Gwendal, Diwezha, Sklerijenn and Brann. While French laws later changed, and Breton names are considered quite normal, the court battles of the 1960s to get legal status for his children made Jacques Le Goarnig famous for his defiance.

For a presentation of cases involving the denial of legal status for Fañch see *Bro Nevez* 148 (December 2018), 152 (December 2019) and 167 (September 2023).

Brittany Loses a Voice for the Breton Language

Job an Irien (1937-2025)

This February 2, 2020, Brittany lost a major defender of the Breton language and culture – Père Job an Irien - at the age of 87.

He was born October 15, 1937, on the farm of Koad Brun in Bodilis (just to the west of Landivisiau in the Bro Leon) where he grew up in a Breton-speaking family. Like other Breton-speaking children he would enter schools in 1944 where Breton was forbidden. But Job an Irien pursued his interest in and love of the Breton language through participation in the activities of Bleun Brug and learned to write in Breton.

He studied for the priesthood at the Seminary of Quimper and was ordained in 1962 as a priest for Pont-Croix. With the belief that Breton should serve in the transmission of Breton culture and spirituality, he translated a number of liturgical materials into Breton, including the Catholic mass book and the New Testament of the Bible. As in the schools, the Breton language was not always welcome in the church so these resources were welcome to Breton speakers.

He is probably best remembered for the creation of the Breton-speaking spiritual center Minihi Levenez which hosted numerous events for young people and families in the 1990s and well beyond. He also organized pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Ireland Wales and Cornwall and took part in organizing Brittany's Tro Breiz and Tro Sant-Pol pilgrimages.

Besides research and translation of spiritual documents, he published cantiques and composed songs, including the Cantata Ar Marh Dall with music by René Abjean and the collaboration of numerous Breton singers and musicians. In 2011 he published a collection of over 300 psalms and cantiques in Breton.

For his life-long promotion of the Breton language and culture he was inducted into Brittany's Order of the Ermine in 2007. (See *Bro Nevez* 104, November 2007).

More information about the life of Job an Irien can be found on:

The Ar Gedour website (argedour.bzh) with an article by Eflamm Caouissin, February 2, 2025

A note by Agence Bretagne Presse posted February 4, 2025

A review of Job an Irien's life and funeral service by Fañch Broudic's on his blog, languebretonne.org, for February 4 and 12.

Breton Culture Under Financial Stress

Alarms have been going out from various cultural organizations as financial support remains stagnant or is cut back and their activities continue to expand. Despite the high engagement of volunteers in cultural organizations of Brittany, small staffs are stretched to maintain and grow activities that are in high demand.



Coop Breizh

Currently on the block for sale is Coop Breizh after several years of struggling to meet expenses. Founded in 1957 by Yann Goasdoué, Coop Breizh has been a key player in the publication of books and production of music recordings, and just as importantly it has served as a distribution center for these from many other producers, large and small. For many years it has been the go-to place to find books and recordings (and other products) to order by mail and online, as well as in person at several stores – in Paris, Rennes and Quimper. The remaining store in Quimper was sold to bring in needed finances and Arfolk has taken over music recordings.

One can find books and recordings for purchase online at various sites for publishers/producers and in person at a limited number of shops in Brittany, but it is hoped that someone will be taking on the Coop Breizh enterprise to continue the important work of making Breton materials widely accessible.



Sonerion

Bodadeg ar Sonerion was created in 1948 to support the creation of bagadoù (plural for bagad) and sonneurs de couple (bombard paired with biniou koz or biniou braz). Today there are some 120 bagadoù that are part of Sonerion and it works in all five departments of Brittany as well as in the Breton diaspora in organizing contests, festivals and teaching. Sonerion employs over 60 people – some for administrative work but the majority for teaching.

Sonerion has also sounded the alarm concerning financial challenges as it builds budget deficits – estimated to be 115,000 Euros for 2024. The organization of competitions for the bagad – structured in five different levels – consumes a large part of expenses and the mobilization of staff and volunteers already stretched thin in maintaining the work of Sonerion. Added to the financial concerns are some internal disagreements in operation and planning.

At the January meeting of Sonerion's administrative council a decision was made to reduce activities and put a pause on summer competitions to give time for preparing future structure and planning. But a press releaser of March 4 from the Inter-Celtic Festival of Lorient noted that the top level bagadoù would compete for the Polig Monjarret Trophy awarded by a public vote for a new creation. The bagadoù will also participate in other events during the festival with bagadoù of the second level also joining in.

The level one category of bagadoù competed in Brest this February and Bagad Cap Caval was declared the champion for 2025 (as it was in 2024). Bagad Kemper was second, Bagad Roñsed-Mor (Locoal-Mendon) was third, Bagad Brieg fourth, and Kevrenn Alre fifth.

Check out the Sonotek section of Sonerion.bzh for recordings of contests for bagadoù and paired sonneurs de couple and other combinations of instruments.



Dastum

In the most recent issue of Dastum's magazine, *Musique Bretonne* (No. 281, January 2025), Dastum's president Ronan Guéblez notes in his editorial that Dastum is facing significant challenges as financial support is being cut back. Created by volunteers in 1972, Dastum's

archives of music and oral traditions (as well as visual documents) has grown significantly so that paid staff are necessary for its work to maintain and make materials accessible.

As a public service Dastum has opened its archival holdings to anyone who wants to consult things for no fees (but you need to subscribe). From 500 consultants five years ago it has grown to 9,000 – clearly a service in demand. And in following music in Brittany, it is clear that singers and musicians have delved into Dastum's holdings for inspiration as well as music and song to incorporate into their repertoires.

Dastum is a treasure and loss of any of its paid staff will jeopardize its ability to preserve and support the development of music and oral traditions of Brittany.

Check out the website dastum.bzh/fondsdedotation if you can consider supporting Dastum.



European Championship of Celtic Wrestling

Gouren is Brittany's particular style of wrestling with a long tradition shared by other Celtic countries as well. In Scotland and England a variation called Backhold is found. And wrestlers from a variety of European countries practice these types today. Thus, a European championship is a hotly contested event.

The town of Saint-Renan in the Bro Leon of northern Finistère will host the 2025 competitions on April 19 and 20 with some 120 wrestlers (male and female of different age groups) to compete. They come from Brittany of course, but also Scotland, England, Iceland, Austria, Italy, Spain and Serbia. Some 2,000 spectators are expected, and the event is supported by some 150 volunteers and 50 officials to judge the wrestling. The events are organized by Skolioù Gouren Bro Leon, under the auspices of the Fédération de Gouren and the Fédération Internationale des Luittes Celtiques.

As described in the Agence Bretagne Presse bulletin on the competition, gouren is emblematic of Breton sports and is practiced with the wrestlers standing up. The objective is to throw the opponent on their back (called a *lamm*). There are some 1,600 licensed wrestlers in Brittany and 10,000 wrestlers in the schools.

Backhold is also practiced standing with a particular hold of combatant's shirts. The object is to be the first to make an opponent fall. Both styles require a great deal of strength and agility.

Accompanying the competitions will be a conference called “Transmission du patrimoine culturel ludique de la Bretagne: forces, faiblesses et outils de transmission” (Transmission of Brittany’s games of cultural patrimony: strengths, weaknesses and tools for transmission). The conference is organized in collaboration with the Association Européenne des Jeux et Sports Traditionnels.

Outside of competitions and the conference there will be plenty of opportunities for participants to meet in friendship and a shared celebration of heritage.



100th Anniversary of the Founding of Gwalarn

In March 2025 the 10th anniversary of the Breton language literary magazine Gwalarn will be the occasion for a travelling exhibit, roundtable discussion and associated activities.

The objective of Gwalarn in 1925 was to create a form for Breton language writers to create a modern literature equivalent to those of other countries. And to combat the stereotype that the Breton language was fit only for peasants to talk to their animals and create folk tales. Kannadig Gwalarn was also created as a magazine for young people.

First published as a supplement to the journal Breiz Atao, by its Number 7 issue Gwalarn was independent and published 165 issues in all. A few of the better known of Gwalarn’s contributors included Roparz Hemon (its founder), Abeozen, Xavier de Langlais, Youenn Drezen, Jakez Riou, Roperzh er Mason and Maodez Glandour. One can find the complete collection of Gwalarn on the site of the Archives départementales du Finistère. A good presentation of Gwalarn’s authors and its raison d’être is found in an article by Bernez Rouz (“1925; Coup de jeune sur la littérature en langue bretonne avec la revue Gwalarn”) posted February 23 on his site: www.tresor-breton.bzh

The exhibit is composed of 18 panels designed by members of the reading group of the Ti ar Vro cultural center of Quimper and Armel an Hejer for Kevre Breizh which is funding its creation. The panels present the links from the Gwalarn movement to Breton language literature today. Texts for the exhibit are in Breton with French translations available by QR code or paper copies.

The exhibit and conference to note the 100th anniversary of Gwalarn’s founding will open on March 1st at the Sked center in Brest with a morning meeting to present Skriv, the Breton writers association, and an afternoon roundtable led by Bernez Rouz with the participation of

Erwan Hupel, Pierrette Kermoal, Tristan Loarer and Tudual Huon - all Breton language writers.

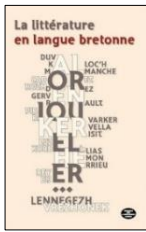
Besides speakers to discuss the influence of Gwalarn on modern Breton literature several films can accompany the exhibit – a documentary by Kalanna about Roparz Hemon and Youenn Drezen, three fantasy films from France 3 based on stories by Jakez Riou and Roparz Hemon, and a film in French, “La jeune folle” based on the life of Meavenn, another writer of the Gwalarn period.

While Gwalarn was published only from 1925 to 1944 it stimulated the production of important Breton language literature that had had a lasting impact, including the journal Al Liamm (1946 to the present) which like Gwalarn serves to present fiction and non-fiction work of Breton language writers.

With the anniversary events for the founding of Gwalarn attention has been brought to the need to create literature for both adults and younger readers whose numbers have grown with the growth of Diwan Breton language schools and bilingual programs in the public and Catholic schools in Brittany. The work of Gwalarn writers to translate and introduce literature of the world to its Breton language readers has certainly not ended in more recent years.

In the December 2021 issue of *Bro Nevez* (Number 160) a new translation of *The Hobbit* by American Joshua Tyra was noted (see that issue for an introduction to him and his interest in the Breton language). While certainly not a complete list, that issue of *Bro Nevez* also noted some more recent translations of American, British, French and other language works into Breton. That list included Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, L. Frank Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz*, Shakespeare’s *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, and Flan O’Brien’s *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth* in English translation)

According to an article by Eric Pianezza-Le-Page for Agence Bretagne Presse (February 24, 2025) one can find a list of classic novels translated into Breton on the website of Office Public de la langue bretonne: fr.brezhoneg.bzh. (Look in the category Programme de traduction littéraire). This website is both in French and Breton. He also notes that the media center of the Cultural Institute of Brittany (Skol Uhel ar Vro) contains some 200 Breton translations of books in its collection of Breton language materials.



A New Book on Literature in the Breton Language

La littérature en langue bretonne des origines à nos jours. Editions des Montagnes Noires, 2024. 365 pages.

This reference work presents Breton texts from the Middle Ages to the present including poetry, theater, novel excerpts, short stories and essays. Each text is given a presentation and notes about its author. The publication was directed by Cédric Choplin, Myriam Guillevic, Tristan Loarer and Pascal Rannou with the input of a number of Breton scholars and writers. Besides being a collection of important Breton language texts, the anthology gives a view of changes in the Breton language over time.

For a bit more detailed presentation see the Agence Bretagne Presse posting of February 18, 2025.

The History of France from Different Perspectives

A Few New (and not so new) Books from Yoran Embanner

Lois Kuter

Accounts of history may glorify events and people, ignore events and people, reinterpret events and the role of individuals in them, and lead readers to accept such accounts as the absolute truth, or challenge the viability of such accounts.

As more and more historians and readers examine more and more accounts from diverse perspectives, based on increasingly available documentation and archival materials, we are likely to get closer to an understanding of the past. Seems obvious.

But, most of us have only been given a very narrow window to look at the past of our own and other countries. I recall learning very little of world history in school – the pyramids and mummies of Egypt, kings and queens of England and France. I never understood why I needed to memorize the names of kings and queens. And, why didn't my history books include anything much of Africa, Asia or the rest of the Americas. Thankfully, Curious children and adults these days have expanded options in books and other media to learn.

It must be admitted that American history of my school days tended to make heroes of pioneers who conquered and settled a vast wilderness presumed to be devoid of civilization. Only in recent years was I to learn that

William Penn, founder of the State of Pennsylvania where I live, was a slaveholder. And only in recent years was I to become aware that the Indigenous people of this area – the Lenape – still live here. Not all of them were driven away and not all died from diseases and violence brought by settlers, although they did lay low until more recent times to avoid being moved away or forced to give up traditions deemed savage.

While the American education system has provided children with a history that glorifies our past, France serves as a model where schools have served (and continue to serve) to indoctrinate children with a certain idea of history and good citizenship. To be French is to speak French – and only tolerably another language like Breton.

One can claim that the telling of history always has a bias, and the perspective of those in power – the conquering heroes – has predominated. Telling a history to justify colonization of another people and cultural domination is perhaps less present today as those who have been conquered – from Native Americans to Bretons or Kurds – have more tools to search archives and publish their open perspective of history.

In a statement at the back of the book *Une Épuration Ethnique à la Française* by Bernard Wittmann (reviewed below) the publisher Yoran Embanner notes the following (my translation):

Since 2003, the Breton publisher Yoran Embanner, in solidarity with national minorities of Europe, has specialized in publishing bilingual dictionaries of lesser spoken language, and books on the history of stateless nations. Its aim is for each people and especially those who have had an unfortunate history, to reappropriate their native heritage, culture, language and history.

Indeed, Yoran Embanner has published dozens of dictionaries (Breton-French, German/Alsatian, Irish Gaelic/French, Breton/English ...) as well as a series of histories from the point of view of those to whom those histories belong or of others outside of French academia. These include Scotland, Moselle, Kurdistan, Flanders, Ukraine, and of course Brittany, as well as the book reviewed below: *Histoire de la France – Le point de vue Breton*.



Jean-Pierre Le Mat. *Histoire de la France – Le point de vue breton - des origines jusqu'aux prémices de la dislocation.* (Yoran Embanner, 2024. 283 pages. ISBN 978-2-36785-074-0)

This little paperback (4 ½ x 6 ¾ inches in size) is not so small when it comes to presenting the history of France. Certainly it is just a place to start – a

way to dip your toe in the waters and discover that there are different perspectives on the history of what is today France.

The chapters are short starting with the emergence of the Franks within the Roman Empire of the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. Chapters continue with the Franks leading up to Clovis as the king of the Franks (481-511), the Franks after Clovis (511-751), the Carolingian kings (751-987), the Capetians (987-1180), the first kings of France (1180-1328), the Hundred Years War (1328-1453) the end of the Middle Ages (1453-1492), the ending of the Italian Renaissance (1494-1559), the wars of religion (1559-1598), Absolutism (1598-1789), the invention of the citizen (1789-1799), the First Empire (1799-1815), a liberal trend (1815-1870), the Third Republic (1870-1940), the France of the General [De Gaulle] (1940-1986), and finally, the period of 1986 to the present.

In a useful preface the author explains why a Breton might have a different view of the history of France and how French history has been constructed to prop up the idea of a French nation-state. American readers have probably been given only a glimpse of the history of France and may not fully appreciate the importance of new perspectives like the one presented by Le Mat. But I found this book especially interesting in the citations from by a variety of sources – historians and observers from the Roman world, England, Germany, Brittany, etc.

The squeezing of so much information into a few pages can leave one overwhelmed by a few to many names and events, but this is not a book you will sit down and read cover to cover in one sitting. For the truly lazy Le Mat summarizes the gist of each chapter in one of two sentences, but this will not tell you much without reading the rest of the chapter.

I especially appreciated the opening page(s) of each chapter which provide some key dates and events in Europe and the rest of the world. This includes lots of events from the Celtic world in Brittany, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. This gives some perspective to the history of France in the context of other world events. During the 3rd and 4th centuries, for example, the Ghanaian Empire was founded in Africa, porcelain was invented in China, and the classic period of Mayan civilization was beginning in South America. Or, for the 987-1180 period Brian Boru defeated the Vikings in Ireland in 1014 at the Battle of Clontarf, William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066, and the Angkor Wat temple was built in Cambodia in the 12th century. Towards the year 1000 Leif Erikson “discovered” America.

Indeed, this new book on the history of France by Jean-Pierre Le Mat brings a new perspective to the evolution of France.

Jean-Pierre Le Mat has also written several other books about Breton and French history to be recommended:

Ils ont fait la France – Contre-enquête – De Clovis à Charles De Gaulle, Yoran Embanner, 2015 (reviewed in *Bro Nevez* 134, May-June 2015). – a history of France with a focus on people who have been presented as major “heroes” of that history.

Histoire de Bretagne – Le point de vue Breton, 3rd edition, Yoran Embanner, 2014 (reviewed in *Bro Nevez* 133, March 2015)

History of Brittany – The Breton Point of View, Yoran Embanner, 2016 (reviewed in *Bro Nevez* 138, July 2016)

His website contreculture.org is also an interesting place for an exploration of Breton identity and history.

Just recently Jean-Pierre Le Mat has created a website called **breizhia.org** where artificial intelligence is used to create responses to questions users may ask. These are especially directed to Breton identity, Brittany and its history, the history of Celtic nations, Breton nationalism, and ideas on the future of Brittany as well as other topics that might be chosen. In forming a response AI draws for its answers from books and articles Le Mat has written and his website contreculture.org as well as postings he has put on Agence Bretagne Presse or Ni Hon Unan. I tried this out and asked the question: “Why is a Breton perspective of the history of France different from a French perspective?” And yes, questions can be posed in English and the response will be in English. And the response to my question came back almost instantly. Here it is:

The Breton perspective on the history of France differs due to several factors. Firstly, the Breton viewpoint stems from a sense of independence and a unique cultural identity that is distinct from the French narrative. While the facts of history may be the same, the interpretation and emphasis can vary. For instance, what might be considered significant in French history could be seen as less relevant from a Breton perspective.

Breton historians often highlight aspects such as the existence of Breton kings, the political independence of Breton dukes, and the illegitimacy of French claims over Brittany. These elements are crucial in Breton historiography but might be downplayed or interpreted differently in French accounts.

Moreover, the Breton identity is seen as both insufficient and incomparable, often leading to a narrative that is more about relationships and cultural exchanges rather than power and dominance, which is a common theme in French history. This divergence in perspectives is also

a reflection of the broader cultural and historical differences between Brittany and France. Breizh da viken !



Bernard Wittmann. *Une Épuration ethnique à la française – Alsace-Moselle 1918-1922*. Yoran Embanner, 2016. 222 pages. ISBN 978-2-36747-026-9.

This book focuses on the World War I period (1919-1922) and immediate post war period to shed light on stereotypes about Alsace-Lorraine and its place within France and Germany promoted by France at different periods of history. The author points out that while annexation to Germany in 1871 was tense at first, the opportunities for economic advancement and tolerance of Alsatian language and culture meant that most were not unhappy being part of Germany during the period leading to the World War. Wittmann cites numerous documents and studies to bring a more balanced perspective to the “French” identity of this border region where there were French speakers as well as speakers of the Germanic Alsatian language and other unique dialects.

The desire for revenge on the part of France to retake Alsace-Lorraine was fueled by French literature and propaganda to give the idea that the people of this region suffered traumatically under German rule. This view of the martyrdom of a French population in Alsace-Lorraine seems to have a long life as shown in the very summarized depiction of the 1870-71 events in the book by Denis W. Brogan, *Life World Library – France* (Time Inc., NY, 1963).

The defeat of 1870-1871 [of France by Germany] ended the long reign of “The Great Nation.” It soon became apparent that the German victory was no accident. Every kind of power – military, political, economic, above all industrial – was not concentrated on the other side of the Rhine. And, far more terrible, in the peace treaty which follows the war, the deeply French eastern provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were torn, against their bitter protests, from the France, which, even in defeat, they so greatly preferred to the new and victorious Germany.

The relative autonomy for Alsace-Lorraine to govern itself under German rule changed radically after 1918 when some 130-150,000 Germans living in that region and others suspected of being pro-German were forcibly expelled from the area with their homes and businesses confiscated and a limited amount of baggage and cash allowed to be taken with them.

The post-war period with Alsace-Lorraine again part of France brought a conscious effort on the part of France to de-Boche this region with the imposition of French

administrators and implementation of a French-language only policy in schools and public life. Those speaking German or Alsatian were automatically suspect of being enemies of France. The reproduction of numerous documents, photographs and images throughout the book eloquently show the “ethnic cleansing” that took place in this period.

The cultural and linguistic intolerance was certainly part of the history of all those non-French speaking areas within the French borders and in colonies established by France in other parts of the world.



Joan-Pere Pujol. *Les colonisés de l'Hexagone pendant la grande guerre 1914-1918*. Yoran Embanner, 2024. 179 pages. ISBN 978-2-36747-108-2.

The Great War, or World War I, had a profound impact on Europe as central European empires (German, Ottoman empire, Austria-Hungary) fought the Allies (France, United Kingdom, Russia, U.S) and the impact extended to colonies of those countries. Over 73 million soldiers took part in the war where over 9 million lost their lives. Some 7 million civilians were also victims of the war and 20 million soldiers and civilians were wounded.

The author Joan-Pere Pujol begins this book with a good introduction as to how France entered into the war – the steps and missteps it took in what was predicted to be a short war. He also describes how the population of France was prepped for war. France was spoiling for war to “take back” areas lost to Germany. Schools were particularly effective in promoting patriotism and militarism, even creating the “battalions scolaires” where boys starting at the age of twelve marched, wore uniforms, and were mentally prepared to become soldiers.

Pujol looks at ten different population groups – the colonized of the Hexagone (France) referred to in the book’s title – and their role in the war. He presents the particular impact the war had on each and how the military viewed these peoples whose different languages and geographic position threw suspicion on their French patriotism. The following is just a quick summary of some of the content in this book which is supplemented by lots of photographs and images, as well as a useful chronology of events and bibliography of references cited.

He begins with Alsace-Lorraine, a region with a Germanic heritage as well as a French-speaking one. As Wittmann described in *Une épuration ethnique à la française* reviewed above, France had a particular desire to “liberate” this area from Germany. In the war effort in this region measures were taken to limit the presence of

“enemies” among Alsatian-Lorraines – some people opted to serve in the French army, others who might be mobilized to fight for Germany were put in internment camps. The post war period was particularly difficult for those who wanted to retain their Alsatian heritage and language. The autonomous status of the area was lost when Alsace-Lorraine was incorporated into France in 1919. The author notes that the shows of joy by its citizens were a product of propaganda. A zealous effort was made to do-Boche the population with expulsions to Germany of any Germans who had resided in Alsace (no matter how long), of those of mixed marriages, and those who showed pride in a Germanic heritage. As described in Wittmann’s book French administrators and teachers were parachuted in to ensure that Alsace-Lorraine would become French.

In the section on Brittany Pujol clarifies how Bretons and others from rural areas of France served as cannon fodder with a high number on the frontlines and consequential loss of life. Estimates vary from 125,000 to 240,00 deaths but Pujol identifies 140-150,000 as the probable number – 22% of Bretons mobilized versus 16-17% for France as a whole. These numbers do not include those badly injured who died after the end of the war.

Pujol notes the impact on the Breton language as soldiers were forced to learn and use French to survive. Those returning participated in a process of French acculturation to spare families the humiliation they had suffered as “ploucs.” Also noted is the rise in alcoholism and suicide among returning soldiers.

North Catalonia was ceded to France at the Treaty of the Pyrenees in 1659. Numerous Catalans in Spain and other countries joined the French Foreign Legion to fight against Germany with the hope that Catalonia would gain recognition as a unique region and autonomy with the Versailles Treaty. They would be disappointed.

In contrast to other regions the people of the northern area of the Basque land were attached to the idea of being part of France. But Basque soldiers had high rates of desertions and those refusing to serve at all – as with the Catalans. The border with Spain made it easy to find assistance and asylum and there was also a significant emigration to the United States or South America.

Flanders was subject to frequent efforts on the part of France to take control of its land with annexation by France with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. This brought a requirement for the use of French – which was spoken in Flanders along with Flemish in different parts of Flanders. This had an impact on education, administration and the church. Flanders was directly impacted by the war with German occupation and the total destruction of towns and villages in the combat.

The Occitans who fought in the war were stereotyped as lazy, unreliable and weak. Soldiers were blamed for the disastrous planning of the war’s leaders and accused of cowardice.

Savoy, an area of the northern Alps bordering on Italy and Switzerland, had been independent until 1860. With annexation by France freedom of the press would disappear and those not in favor of becoming French would be threatened. As with the rest of France schools were used to create a hatred of Germany and to prepare children to become soldiers. The particular history of Savoy was eliminated from teaching. Heavy losses of Savoyard soldiers during World War I had a major impact on the economy of the area.

Jewish people in both France and Germany showed strong support for the war effort to prove patriotism and to counter antisemitic stereotypes. But antisemitism was on the rise during the war and Jews were suspect of being part of a Bolshevik communist uprising. Propaganda was used to downplay their contributions in France to the war effort.

Gypsies were in France by the 15th and 16th centuries and not particularly welcomed. Gypsies arriving from Central Europe in the 19th century were viewed as social deviants and were watched and carded by police for their nomadic lifestyle. They were considered bad French citizens and thus dangerous – especially in their travel across borders. Many were sent to internment camps during the war.

In the section of the book on Savoy, Pujol provides an eloquent summary of the impact of World War I on languages in France and this seems worth including here (my translation):

The period following the war was also a turning point to make the vernacular languages disappear. According to Jacobian principles put forth by the Abbé Grégoire during the Revolution, the Republic has not ceased to work to “annihilate the patois and make the use of the French language universal.” During the period when the expression of power of the great nation-states reached a culmination, regional cultures were more than ever denigrated and ignored. There was stronger and stronger pressure on families so that they would no longer speak Savoyard to their children (equally strong for other regional languages). French was imposed as the language of the war, that which allowed for the transmission of orders from the top to the front lines, that which gave one pride in belonging to the immense colonial French empire on which the sun would never set. The First World War perfected a new order made up of subdivisions for which one had carefully erased all their own cultural consistency. From the First World War

on, the maternal language would be less and less Savoyard and more and more French.



Louis Mélenec. *Invasion et annexion – Anne de Bretagne face à la destruction du Duché par la France.*

Yoran Embanner, 2024. 807 pages. ISBN 978-2-36785-073-3.

This is a small paperback book – a standard 4 ¼ x 6 ¾” in size, but 1 ½” thick with 807 pages. I consider it important to read any book I review from cover to cover, and this was a bit of a tour de force for me since my French is not perfect. (My apologies for any mis-translations of quotes.)

In his Preface to this new book about Anne of Brittany the author notes that the object of his research work is to:

Reestablish the truth about the history of Brittany, which is falsified, and even denied.

Make this history accessible to Bretons so they can reclaim it.

Make this history known at the highest levels of the government so that, among other things, they can no longer oppose its teaching.

In this book Mélenec draws on a large number of documents – books and letters – from the 16th century and by modern historians to call out what he finds as false accounts of Brittany’s history and to present more modern models of reliable scholarship. Certainly historians have written in support of France’s glorious past and this has been incorporated into school books. But others have disputed these glowing reviews of France and Mélenec does not hesitate to chastise a “cleansed” history of France’s invasion of Brittany in the 15th century.

He focuses on the period of 1487 to 1492 and the invasion of France and consequent marriages of Duchess Anne of Brittany to French kings Charles VIII and then Louis XII. This was a period of European history with complicated politics using marriages of women of royal and high standing families to obtain wealth, territory, and allegiance of powerful individuals. Mélenec devotes a number of pages to explaining civil and church laws, particularly regarding Duchesse Anne’s marriage to Charles VIII in 1491 while she was already married to Maximilian of Germany. There were all sorts of deceptive measures taken to insure that the marriage to Charles VIII was a *fait accompli* before it could be challenged. Anne viewed the marriage as the only means possible to avoid total destruction of Brittany by France. Brittany was badly outnumbered in its army and lacked finances to sustain battles. It was of course not quite that simple.

A big focus of Mélenec’s research and this book is to counter the history commonly accepted that the marriage between Duchess Anne and Charles VIII and then Louis XII were true love matches. And that there was a “treaty” in 1532 between Brittany and France which was freely accepted by both sides. Mélenec argues that this was in fact an edict from France. He concludes *Brittany was not in reality ‘reunited’ with France, it was invaded, conquered, reduced, annexed.*” And this invasion started after Brittany’s defeat in 1488 at Saint-Aubin-du-Cormier, with French troops occupying key cities of Brittany – with the compliance of Bretons themselves seeking power.

As to the validity of France’s annexation of Brittany Mélenec concludes: *Bretons having neither treated nor discussed, nor accepted a so-called ‘treaty of reunion’ in 1532 with France, Brittany remains, according to international law, a sovereign and independent power. France is an occupying country, Brittany is under French administration, which is and remains a foreign country.*

There is a great deal of drama in the pages of this book and French Kings and associates are not painted in a complementary fashion - deservedly so. And Bretons who switched sides to support France against Brittany in response to French promises of power and glory are not spared. It sometimes seems as if Mélenec is carrying on what he repeats often in the book as a millennial hatred of Bretons by the French and of the French by Bretons.

Besides the wheeling and dealing to set up marriages to acquire wealth, new territories and prestige, the book is full of betrayals, spying, lying, unkept promises, power grabs, intrigue, plots and conspiracies. In their invasion the French are depicted as greedy and cruel with pillaging, raping, and destruction of towns, villages, crops and countryside. This was not unusual in the history of invading armies.

Intrigue and suspicion of plots was a common thing and Mélenec recounts one story of a hatmaker from France bringing specially made hats to the Duke of Brittany in 1481. It was thought that the king of France might be trying to kill the duke with a poisonous powder, so the hatmaker was forced to wear each hat before being cleared of suspicion.

There are a number of reminders in Mélenec accounts that made me wonder if politics have changed in the last 500 years. In 1488 after the defeat of Bretons at Saint-Aubin-du-Cormier, the French remain in Brittany occupying key towns. In describing a proposed peace treaty (*Traité de Couéron*) Mélenec notes that France accused the Duke of Brittany of being the aggressor who forced France to invade Brittany. As I was reading this

part of the book I had just finished reading an article in my newspaper (February 20) describing my President's assertion based on the story given by Russia that it was Ukraine who forced the invasion by Russia. Another case of the victim being blamed by the aggressor. The greed, lying and deal-making has certainly not disappeared from modern politics and there are wannabe kings out there who use fear and threats to get their way.

But, back to this important book about Anne of Brittany. Mélenec's style of writing is what some might call long-winded. There is a lot of repetition. The recapping of events and people presented in previous pages of the books as well as presentations of events to be described in chapters to come can be helpful – particularly to readers like me who have only a limited knowledge of Breton and French history. But, the repetitions might be considered unnecessary by other readers. One could get the gist of the story being told in this book by reading just the Preface and Conclusion. But, as the expression goes, the Devil is in the detail, and there is plenty of detail to be found and appreciated in this work.



Two Other New Books on the History of France Noted

Jean-Jacques Monnier. *Un Millénaire de Pouvoir Vertical, 1987-1815 – Histoire*

de la centralisation française, Tome 1 / Le Jacobinisme : Une Addiction Française, 1918-2025 – Histoire de la centralisation française, Tome 2.
L'Harmattan, 2025.

Jean-Jacques Monnier is a Breton historian who has published a number of books on the history of Brittany. Here he provides his perspective on the history of French centralization in two volumes.

Volume I – A Millenium of Vertical Power, 987-1815 – describes the origins of a centralized state in the Middle Ages with the growth of monarchies who conquered previously independent nations such as Brittany, Provence or Bourgogne to pull them into a political system controlled by powerful kings and a centralized administration. The French Revolution ending in 1799 brought even more centralization in the name of equality and unification.

Volume 2 – Jacobinism, a French Addiction, 1815-2025 – looks at the post Napoleonic period and the continuation of a highly centralized political system to the present. The centralization of the late 19th century was especially effective in centralizing schools, administration and the economy to reinforce uniformity.

Also explained are the failed efforts for decentralization and the return of power to the regions of France.



Istor Breizh The History of Brittany, Brittany in History

In the December issue of *Bro Nevez* the launching of the quarterly journal *Istor Breizh* was briefly noted. Now that I have the first issue in hand, it is important to present this “book-magazine” as the director Jacques-Yve Le Touze and editor in chief Christian Guerou rightfully call it.

7 ½ by 10 ½ inches in size its 112 pages are bound in a thick carboard cover. Pages are not the flimsy paper of most magazines but a solid substance one would find for high quality books. In the introduction by Le Touze and Guerou (in French and Breton) it is noted that Breton history is not much taught in the schools of Brittany nor found in major media. *Istor Breizh* is meant to fill this gap and provide a place for varying points of view on Breton history.

It is inspired by the earlier magazine *Dalc'homp Sonj* published from 1985 to 1998, and like that earlier magazine, *Istor Breizh* is rich in illustrations with the equivalent of some 40 pages of art reproductions, drawings, photos and many full-page illustrations in color. Some fifteen different authors contribute some twenty articles. Some forty pages are devoted to the Seiz Breur arts movement in general and with a focus on Jeanne Malivel and René-Yves Creston as well as a few articles on other artists associated with the movement. Here the full color reproductions of the work of these artists is particularly appreciated.

Another feature of this issue of *Istor Breizh* is a presentation of ranging points of view on the controversial museum exhibit *Celtique?* In twenty-four pages Christian Guerou, Ronan Le Coadic, Corinne Poulain and Jean-Michel Le Boulanger comment on how this exhibit guided visitors to look at Brittany's Celtic identity.

Most articles range from just one or two pages to six pages, with a generous use of space for illustrations or photographs. This certainly makes them inviting for those seeking an introduction to a given topic or figure in Breton history. Authors are all well know scholars of Brittany but articles are not “academic” in style and thus highly accessible to a general public as well as high school or college students.

Here are the topics for the shorter articles of this first *Istor Breizh* (my translation/summary of the titles into English).

The war of independence in Ireland in the 1920s (Il y a un siècle, la difficile naissance de l'État d'Irlande, Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh)

A history of the Breton flag (Une histoire en Gwenn ha du, Mikael Bodlore-Penlaez)

Gold coins presented to Queen Claude, daughter of Anne of Brittany (Quand Nantes offrit son cœur d'or à reine Claude, Gildas Salaün)

Ceramic bas-relief on maritime Brittany by Pierre Toulhoat (Armor de Pierre Toulhoat – lecture d'un bas-relief, Armel Morgant)

A portrait of the renewed Dobrée museum of Nantes (Sept bonnes raisons d'aller (re)visiter Le Musée Dobrée – un réouverture après plus de dix ans d'attente, Julie Rault)

The Battle of Ballon (845) and monuments on its site (La Bataille de Ballon – une Victoire qui en cache une autre, Christian Gouerou)

Thoughts on Istor Breizh and its importance (An dever hag ar gwir da c'houzout, Malo Bouëssel du Bourg)

An exhibit on the knights of the Middle Ages at the history museum of Nantes (Au musée d'histoire de Nantes, la figure emblématique du chevalier)

Commemorations of Armand de la Rouërie (La Rouërie (1757-1793) – une histoire qui revient au grand jour, Jacques-Yves Le Touze)

Thoughts on the importance for Bretons to look at their history (L'Histoire de la Bretagne, ferait-ell peur?, Joël Cornette)

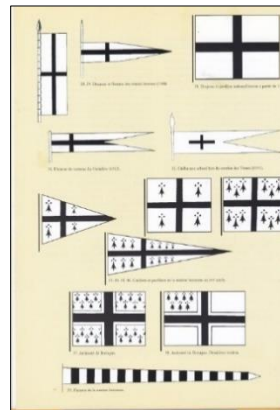
Two pages are also included for short notes on museum exhibits and publications.

Some History on Flags of Brittany

By Roger Tanguy

Since ancient times armies used ensigns, banners. We don't know much about these symbols of those distant times. On the other hand, we know that during the first Crusade, at the call of pope Urban II, in 1095, the members of the expedition to the Holy Places, took a red cross as their emblem. But how would one distinguish the origin of the different crusaders? January 13, 1188, the pope and the sovereigns decided to award flags with crosses of different colors depending on the country of origin. The Bretons chose (or received) the black cross. So those are the

Crusades give birth to the first national emblems that some countries today retain more or less.



The first Breton national flag is therefore the black cross: the *Kroaz Du*. It was still the flag of the Breton navy in the 16th century as can be seen from the documents of the time. The duke Jean III, in 1316 chose for himself and for Brittany an ermine banner. To please the duke, the Breton sailors decided to associate the emblem of the ducal authority by adding ermines speckled in the quarters of their flag. Many

old maps, old nautical charts (called portolans - related to ports or harbors) show these Breton flags. The flag of the military navy, the admiralty, features a black cross bordered in white with ermines speckled in the four quarters.

With the advent of modern times, after WW I, the regionalist movement no longer wanted a flag with a white background which recalled the kings of France, with ermines reminiscent of dukes and a cross, a religious sign. In 1923 Maurice Marchal (who called himself Morvan Marchal), a very controversial character, a political activist, and founder of the newspaper *Breiz Atao*, drew a new "modern" flag inspired of the American flag or perhaps of the coat of arms of Rennes. At the beginning, it was used only for political purposes. Brandishing it was considered a militant act. In the 60's or the 70's, putting a sticker of this flag on your car ran the risk of being recorded by the police.

Today the Gwenn-ha-du is no longer contested, but it is good to remember that the *Kroaz Du* is the oldest Breton National Flag.

Editor's Note: The illustration above is from *Les drapeaux bretons de 1188 à nos jours* by Philippe Rault (Coop Breizh 1998). Also recommended is the book *Guide des drapeaux bretons et celtes* by Divi Kervella and Mikael Bodlore-Penlaez (Yoran Embanner, 2008).

The *Barzaz Breiz* – A Classic Collection of Breton Language Song Texts

Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué (1815-1895) spent much of his childhood and youth in the area of Quimperlé at his family's home of Plessis-Nizon. In return for medical assistance poor people who visited his mother would offer her a song and young La Villemarqué appreciated these. Breton was the language of their home and community.

As a son in a wealthy family he would spend time away at boarding schools and later complete higher education in Paris where he would come to know and be mentored by Jean-François Le Gonidec (1775-1838), a prominent scholar of Breton and Celtic languages and history. La Villemarqué would learn to write in Breton and publish articles in some journals about the songs he collected as a young man.

The first song collection called *Barzaz Breiz* was published in 1839 with a second version in 1845. The version of 1867 was the definitive work which has been republished a number of times since.

During this period of the 19th century tales and legends and songs of the common folk were being widely collected throughout Europe and were felt to present the genius of these civilizations. In some cases, the original texts were greatly enhanced by the collectors.

In the case of La Villemarqué there were virulent attacks on the authenticity of his texts which seemed too perfect to be the product of lowly Breton speakers. Indeed, in selecting and printing the songs La Villemarqué often completed an incomplete text based on the different versions he collected from singers. And, perhaps some of those attacking La Villemarqué did not appreciate the nationalistic tone of some of the texts where Bretons did battle with the French and English? La Villemarqué was accused of composing the songs in French and then translating them into Breton. Some critics denied that he knew any Breton. His greatest critic was Fañch Gourvil who wrote a 600+ page book (published in 1960) to “prove” that the song texts were not authentic.

The quarrel over the authenticity of the *Barzaz Breiz* was put to rest thanks to the work of Donatien Laurent, a scholar of Breton traditions, who found three notebooks in the La Villemarqué family archives. These include the texts noted by La Villemarqué as he collected them. See the note below on the publication of Donatien Laurent’s research.

I now have five versions of the *Barzaz Breiz* and each is a little different.



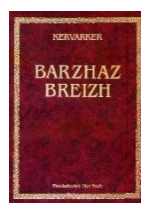
The first copy I was to have is a reproduction of the 1867 publication “*Barzaz-Breiz, Chants Populaires de la Bretagne, par Vicomte Hersart de la Villemarqué* published by Librairie Académique Perrin, Paris, in 1963.

This book contains a ten-page preface, 70-page introduction and a short epilogue by La Villemarqué. The main part of the book is made up of the song texts – the French translation with a much smaller print Breton text below it. Each song is introduced by

what is called an “argument” to give it historical and social context. And following the song texts are additional notes. For each song there is a short music transcription setting words to notes which is found in the last part of the book.

The texts are divided into four parts – Part 1, the longest, is for songs of a mythological nature, heroic and historical ballads – 68 with a few with several parts. Part 2 includes 19 songs for festivals (such as weddings) and songs about love. Part 3 includes 7 texts on religious legends and ceremonies. An appendix includes just one song.

The Perrin published copy of the *Barzaz Breiz* may be the most widely found, but other newer editions bring a different look to this classic song collection.



The 1988 printing by Mouladurioù Hor Yezh – *Kervarker, Barzhaz Breizh*, is a Breton-only version. This has all of the songs from the 1867 edition, but put into a more modern orthography, with a few notes on words and phrases that might need clarification. Each text is headed by its musical transcription. The song text itself is in a nice larger, easy-to-read, font.

Not included is a Breton translation of La Villemarqué’s French language preface, introduction, epilogue or notes introducing or accompanying the songs.

Scattered throughout the book have been added woodcuts by Janed (Jeanne) Malivel which relate to the topics of songs – particularly those relating to Breton history.

This is an elegant publication of 454 pages of a “tan” color and pleasant texture with a hardback cover that simulates a leather binding. Aesthetically, it is a publication for book-lovers as well as those who appreciate the Breton language being given a prominent place.



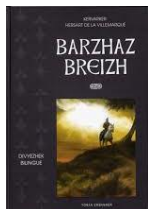
My third version of the *Barzaz Breiz* is the paperback publication of 1997 by Coop Breizh: *Théodore Hersart de La Villemarqué, Le Barzhaz Breizh – Trésor de la Littérature Orale de la Bretagne*.

This is also drawn from the 1867 *Barzaz Breiz* and is intended to be a French language complement to the Mouladurioù Hor Yezh Breton-only printing, omitting the Breton language song texts found in the original in smaller print at the bottom of each page.

This edition also omits the music transcriptions and La Villémarqué’s epilogue and footnotes. Retained are the

preface and introduction that describe La Villemarqué's work in collecting the songs. Also maintained are the "arguments" introducing the songs and notes that follow each song.

A welcome addition to this publication is the addition of a 22-page essay by Per Denez at the beginning of the books to give historical context to the work of La Villemarqué and the challenges made to the authenticity of his texts.



My fourth version of the Barzhaz Breizh is a new 2023 edition recently sent to me by the publisher Yoran Embanner – **Kervarker / Théodore Hersart de La Villemarqué, Barzhaz Breizh.**

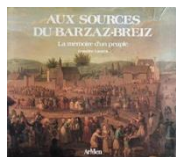
While not quite as elegant as the Mouladurioù Hor Yezh edition, this is also a hard back with large pages and easy to read larger print. Although not stated, this is also the 1867 version.

There is a short preface by Jean-Pierre Le Mat to give some background. Not included are La Villemarqué's preface, introduction, epilogue and the "arguments" presenting each song as well as the note accompanying the songs. What is featured in this new addition is the placement of French translations and the Breton language song texts side by side. I did not comb through each text but the Breton is in a more modern orthography, with a few slight spelling differences from the Mouladurioù Hor Yezh texts.

The music transcription for just 30 of the songs of the 95 found in the Mouladurioù Hor Yezh and Perrin editions are found at the back of the book. For those wanting to learn a song to sing it, the Mouladurioù Hor Yezh edition with music transcriptions right along with each song text is probably the friendliest.

This Yoran Embanner edition seems more directed to readers with the layout for many songs in a "prose" form rather than line by line as a singer would deliver them.

Like the Mouladurioù Hor Yezh edition the new Yoran Embanner printing includes a number of woodcuts by Jeanne Malivel as well as a few drawings by Xavier Haas, Marc Mosnier and Xavier de Langlais. This is certainly an edition that book lovers will appreciate for its quality.



The fifth *Barzhaz Breiz* book I have on my bookshelf is quite different from the others. This is the research results of **Donatien Laurent, Aux sources du Barzhaz-Breiz: le mémoire d'un**

peuple, published by Ar Men in 1989.

I will be lazy and reprint a slightly modified review I did of this book for *Bro Nevez* 34 (May 1990).

The *Barzhaz Breiz* has been a source of heated dispute ever since its quick rise to international fame in the 19th century. Breton historians, linguists, folklorists and literary scholars has passionately debated the authenticity of this well-loved song collection. Are the songs just the product of a young poet (La Villemarqué was in his twenties when he did his collecting) who visited the homes of singers with only a very poor grasp of the Breton language? Donatien Laurent (1935-2020), an ethnologist who has directed the Centre de Recherche Bretonnes et Celtiques in Brest, has answered many questions about the authenticity of the *Barzhaz Breiz* through a detailed analysis of La Villemarqué's notebooks and documents dating from 1834 to 1892 which have been carefully saved by the collector's family. These documents were first shown to Laurent in 1984 when he began his long and tedious analysis which has culminated in *Aux sources du Barzhaz Breiz*.

Two hundred pages of the 340-page work present 184 song texts in Breton with French translation, variant versions, and bibliographic references to other collections in which the songs appear. Laurent's analysis of the notebooks and a careful study of the period in which La Villemarqué lived have allowed the author to present a fascinating view of the activity of song collection – how La Villemarqué actually went about his work and who the singers were from whom he collected song.

Laurent's description of his analysis of texts from the notebooks allows us to follow La Villemarqué from his field collection to a final product that is sometimes a poetic masterpiece and at other times a pale reflection of a more detailed text from his notebook. The *Barzhaz Breiz* was never intended to be a scientific work documenting song as it was actually performed, but a presentation of retouched and "corrected" works for 19th century intellectuals.

Laurent's book is a masterpiece of scholarship, but also stands out in the quality of the production by the Breton publishing house Ar Men. The large pages (9 x 10") and clear print allow one to see all versions of the song texts easily. One can well appreciate the challenge of Laurent's transcription job in seeing reproductions of the notebook and the difficult handwriting. Also found in the book are seven full-page color reproductions of paintings by Breton artist Olivier Perrin who depicted the rural world of 19th century Brittany.



And yet another rendering of the songs from the *Barzaz Breiz* is found in a CD recording and accompanying booklet: **Donatien Laurent, Patrick Malrieu and others, *Tradition chantée de Bretagne***

– ***Les sources du Barzaz-Breiz aujourd'hui***. This was produced in 1989 by Dastum and Ar Men to compliment Laurent's book, described above.

Here too, I draw on a review I did for Bro Nevez 35 (May 1990) to describe this production.

This CD and accompanying 72-page booklet testifies to the beauty of an unbroken oral tradition in Brittany and the interest singers continue to take in songs of the *Barzaz Breiz*. I was particularly moved by the inclusion of two wax cylinder recordings made in 1900 by François Vallée of Marc'harid Fulup whose name I have seen in accounts of 19th century song collection work in Brittany, but whose voice I never dreamed I would hear. Juxtaposed to these short recordings are 1989 performances of the same songs by a then-young singer Ifig Troadec, who is from the same tiny village of Minihiy-Tréguier that boasts of the famous Marc'harid Fulup.

Other young Bretons – in their 20s and 30s at the time of the recording - provide eloquent testimony to the strength of the Breton language song tradition: including Yann Fañch Kemener (1957-2019), Erik Marchand, Claude Lintanf, and Annie Ebrel. These singers learned songs from family and neighbors in their rural communities, but have also used the song collections of previous times as well as recordings to master the performance of the gwerz featured on the CD – long ballads featuring history and dramatic events.

Some of the older masters on the CD – now sadly passed away – have taught songs directly to the younger performers or have inspired them less directly through performances at concerts or festoù noz. These include Manu Kerjean, Mari Harnay and the Goadec sisters. The voices of other older masters are drawn from recordings made in the late 1950s to early 1960s of singers born near the beginning of the 20th century, including Marie-Josèphe Bertrand, Maïvon Bacon, Jeanne-Yvonne Garian and Véronique Broussot. But the inclusion of recordings by singers born in the late 1920s and 30s such as Per Bihoué, Lucien Capitaine and Mona Bozec shows that there are no missing generations in the transmission of Breton song.

Testimony to the strength of Breton musical traditions is certainly provided in the quality and wide range of singers represented on the CD as well as in the excellent accompanying booklet. Documentation includes a map to show the singers' home towns, notes about how and where they learned their songs, and

introductory notes on the song texts and the collection of song in Brittany. Each song text is given in its original Breton, with a French translation. The collector and recording location and date are also noted along with a list of published collections or commercial recordings where a song can be found.

English Language Translations of the Barzaz Breiz

The following is just part of an article by W. C. (William Cooke) Taylor published in 1847 ("The Bards of Brittany," *Bentley's Miscellany*, Vol. 22). W. C. Taylor was born in 1800 and died in 1849 of cholera. He is not to be confused with the author of the best known English translation of the Barzaz Breiz, Tom Taylor (1817-1880).

Tom Taylor published his translation in 1865: *Ballads and Songs of Brittany – Translated from the Barzaz Breiz of Vicomte de la Villemarqué – With some of the Original Melodies Harmonized by Mrs Tom Taylor – With Illustrations by J. Tissot, Je. E. Millais, R. A., J. Tenniel, C. Keene, E. Corbould and H.K. Browne* (London and Cambridge, Macmillan and Co.)

There were also translations of songs from the *Barzaz Breiz* in the 19th century by Miss Stuart Costello (1814-1877) and Carrington Bolton (1823-1906). I do not know if these authors used each other's translations or composed their own – probably from the French rather than Breton language texts.

Here is part of W. C. Taylor's 1847 article "The Bards of Brittany" (original spellings kept).

Brittany preserves more traces of distinct and characteristic nationality than any of the states which the Capets incorporated into their kingdom of France. The aspect of the country, the manners of the inhabitants, and the features, especially of the women, offer to the traveller those marks of the Celtic race which are imprinted on the Scottish Highlands, the mountains of North Wales, and the greater part of the South and West of Ireland. The preservation of their distinct nationality is even more dear to the Bretons than to the Welch, the Scotch, or the Irish: The latest of their poets makes this lesson the burden of this song: -

"Be Bretons for ever, and never be Franks."

Even in the days of *Chouannerie* the Breton royalists never coalesced heartily with the Vendean; the Loire made for them as perfect a separation as the British Channel. Still less were they disposed to aid the English; their popular songs are as full of invectives against the Saxons as the repeal speeches of Daniel O'Connell; blending in delectable confusion the enterprises of Hengist and Horsa with the injuries their country suffered

from the English in the wars of the Plantagenets. Some of the Breton traditions ascend beyond the time of Christianity, and a few related to the struggle between the Christian religion and Druidism, a theological controversy which, according to their account, was conducted much more ardently by the bards than by the priests on the opposite sides.

The chief of the Christian bards was Hyvarnion, who accompanied in his professional capacity the British army which the tyrant Maximus led into Armorica, A.D. 320. He is represented to us as a perfect musician, and an exquisite composer of ballads and canticles. One of the Armorican princes took him into his service, and assigned him a large stipend. Like most of those who accompanied Maximus, Hyvarnion took an Armorican wife, and, according to the fashion of the age, the marriage was preceded by a miracle. One night an angel appeared to the poet in a dream, and told him to go early the next morning to a neighbouring fountain, "on your road," said the divine visitor, "you will meet a young virgin named Rivanon, she is a bard like yourself, and Heaven has predestined her to be your spouse."

Hyvarnion obeyed, and was rewarded by receiving as a wife the most lovely and the most richly-gifted of the maidens of Armorica. The issue of their union was a son named Hervé, who, though born blind, became distinguished as a bard at the early age of five years. It is a whimsical coincidence that some of his canticles were named Hervé's Meditations, and they are said to have had considerable influence in converting the Armoricans from Paganism. The Celtic muse of Britain had thus secured for itself a shelter in the solitudes of Armorica a little before its expulsion from its native island by the sword of the Saxons.

None of the songs of the Christian bards have been preserved, at least in a recognizable shape; we believe, however, that there are some traces of them to be found in the legendary hymns which still form the delight of the peasantry in the remote districts. The odes of Gwenchlan, the great bard of Paganism, had better fortune. Towards the close of the last century they were seen and consulted by Gregory de Rostrenen and Don Lepelletier in the monastery of Laverdennek; but in 1793 the monastery was destroyed and its archives dispersed. M. de la Villemarqué has, however, recovered a few fragments and one entire ode, to which we shall soon direct attention.

Gwenchlan called his odes "Prophecies;" in them he indicates that the Pagan bards were cruelly persecuted by the Christian priests, and, in revenge, he predicts a time when the preachers of so sanguinary a religion would be tracked and hunted through the woods like beasts of prey. This champion of expiring Druidism clung to his ancestral cause with that desperate fidelity which

is characteristic of the Celtic race, such as the Highlanders manifested in the cause of the Stuarts, and the Irish in their attachment to the Latin church. At length he fell into the hands of some petty Christian prince, who put out his eyes and cast him into a dungeon; in these sad circumstances Gwenchlan dictated his last "prophecy." He predicts the overthrow and ruin of the tyrant by whom he had been so cruelly treated, calling him "the lame boar of the wood," while he describes his avenger, the pagan king of Brittany, as "the horse of the sea." There is a ferocious wildness of imagery in the composition, and there is a savage fervour in "its thoughts that breathe, and words that burn" which will justify our inserting a translation, already published in another periodical.

I.

I see the boar coming from the wood; he is very lame;
his foot is wounded:
His throat gapes wide and is full of blood; his bristles are
white with age;
He is surrounded by his young, who grunt from hunger.

I see the horse of the sea coming to engage him; the
shore trembles with fear beneath his tread.
He is as white as the driven snow; he wears horns of
silver on his head.
The water boils around him, heated by the flames that
issue from his nostrils.
The monsters of the deep cluster round him, thick as the
rank grass round a stagnant pool. ---

Hold thine own! Hold thine own! horse of the sea! strike
at the head! strike!
I see the blood flow in a stream. Strike harder, I say,
strike!
The blood is now as high as the knee. I see it flow like a
tide.
Harder I say! Strike harder, and harder still; you will have
rest to-morrow.
Strike boldly, strike bravely! horse of the sea! Strike at
the head, and strike hard.

II.

As I slept calmly in my cold tomb, I heard the eagle issue
his summons in the noon of night.
He summoned his eaglets and all the birds of heaven.
He said to them as they came, - poise yourselves quickly
on both your wings,
It is not the putrid flesh of sheep and dogs, it is the flesh
of Christians which we require -

Come raven of the sea, tell me what is that which you
hold in your beak? -
-- I hold the head of the chieftain that I may devour his
blood-shot eyes -

-- I tear out his eyes as he has torn thine.
 -- And you, fox, what is that which you hold? --
 -- I hold his heart, which was false as mine own,
 -- Which has desired your destruction and consigned
 you to lingering death. --
 -- An you tell me, toad, what is that you are doing with
 the corner of your mouth? --
 -- I am on the watch to seize his soul at the moment of
 its flight.
 It shall dwell in me whilst I live, as a punishment for the
 crime he has committed.
 Against the bard who once dwelt between Roc'h Allaz
 and Porz Owen.

Gwenchlan was one of the last, and was certainly the
 best of the Breton bards. To them succeeded the
 Christian *klers*, who put into verse the legendary lives of
 the saints – that strange stock of Christian fictions which
 has become incorporated with the traditions of almost
 every nation in Europe. “The Golden Legend,” is the best
 collection of these saintly biographies; but there is
 another part of early monkish literature, moral allegory,
 which became exceedingly popular with the Celtic race,
 and which still flourishes in the rude ballads of Ireland,
 and in the rustic tales of Brittany.

We have before us two versions of a very bold
 personification, the “History of the Good Man Misery,”
 the former of which is a Norman production, clearly of
 Teutonic origin, the latter, derived from it, is quite
 changed by the admixture of Celtic ideas and feelings.
 The Norman story, printed on whity-brown paper, in a
 type most trying to the eyes, bears the following title:
*“The new and diverting History of the Good Man Misery,
 in which will be found who Misery is, what has been his
 origin, how he deceived Death, and what length of time
 he sill remain in the world.”* Underneath is the important
 announcement “*The price is four sous,*” and, from the
 abstract we are about to give of the tale, the reader will
 see that the book is a decided bargain.

“Two travellers entered the city of Milan about five in the
 evening; they sought hospitality at a rich man’s gate, but
 were harshly repulsed. A poor widow saw and had
 compassion on them; she told them that she could not
 receive them into her own house through fear of
 scandal, but that she would conduct them to the
 residence of a good man Misery, who, though poor, was
 very charitable.

Misery received them very kindly; aided by the widow he
 gave them a supper of pears and cider, but he took no
 share in the repast, amusing his guests while it lasted,
 by recounting his misfortunes. The worst of these was
 the robbery of his fruit from the only pear-tree in his
 garden. ‘The only prayer I have to make to the Lord,’
 said he, ‘is that whoever shall climb my pear-tree against
 my will may stay there until I give him permission to

come down.’ The pilgrims, who were two unknown
 saints, passed the night in devotion, and, when they took
 their departure in the morning, announced to their host
 that his petition had been granted.

“Several whimsical adventures are recorded of the fruit-
 stealers of Milan and Misery’s pear-tree; but at length its
 occult qualities became known, and the poor old man
 was allowed to eat his pears in peace. Years passed
 away; he became very old and infirm; when one day
 there came a loud knock at his door; he opened it, and
 saw a stranger who announced himself as Death.

“ ‘You are welcome,’ said Misery, ‘come in, I shall be
 ready for you as soon as I eat one of my fine pears.’

“ ‘You are one of the most reasonable men I have met
 with for a long time,’ said Death, ‘go and choose any
 pear you like on the tree.’

“ ‘The old man went out into the garden, accompanied
 by his unwelcome visitor; he gazed fondly on his beloved
 tree, and, pointing to a pear on one of the highest
 branches, said ‘That is the fruit I choose, lend me your
 scythe to cut it down.’

“ ‘That cannot be,’ said Death, ‘it is the decree of Heaven
 that my scythe must never leave my hand. But I am in no
 hurry; I will wait until you climb and pluck it.’

“ ‘Alas! good friend,’ said Misery, ‘I am too feeble for
 such an exertion, perhaps you would be so kind as to
 pluck it for me.’

Death who appears to have been a good fellow at heart,
 climbed yup the tree and plucked the fruit; but, when this
 was done, he found himself caught by the spell; when he
 was up he could not get down. The dialogue that follows
 between Misery and Death is irresistibly comic, but we
 can only quote the conclusion.

“ ‘My good friend Misery,’ said Death, ‘you can boast of
 being the first who has conquered Death. Heaven
 consents that I should quit you, and not see you again
 before the Day of Judgement, after I have finished my
 great work, the destruction of the human race.’ “

Death having pledged his word to this effect, Misery
 allowed him to descend; “and thus,” concludes our
 author, “Misery will continue upon earth so long as the
 world remains a world.”



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