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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Gary Manchec German

In 2000, the Universities of Western Brittany and the University of Southern Brittany launched a Summer school project entitled *Patrimoine celtique d'hier, d'aujourd'hui et de demain* in Lorient. It was timed to coincide with the “Interceltic Festival” which takes place there every August. The focus was on the cultures and musical traditions of the Celtic countries. The team of organisers was composed of the Celticist, Joseph Rio, the historian and specialist of Breton maritime culture, François Chappé as well as Donatien Laurent and Fañch Postic (CNRS, CRBC), both specialists of Breton oral literature. Activities were organized in conjunction with Jean-Pierre Pichard, the director of the Lorient Interceltic Festival. Sadly, the project came to an end in 2003.¹

In early 2009, Gary Manchec German (Breton & English linguistics, CRBC) proposed a new orientation for a Breton summer school. Over the years, in his discussions with fellow Celticists and linguists in international conferences and colloquia, he was struck by the number of colleagues who expressed their interest in learning the Breton language. However, many of these also spoke of their inability to do so on account of the French-language barrier. Conscious of this demand, German proposed the idea of a summer school to the CRBC (*Centre de recherche bretonne et celtique*), at the University of Western Brittany, Brest, which would be dedicated to the teaching of the Breton language and Breton cultural studies. His objective was to design an intensive course which would be largely taught through the medium of English. Initially, the proposal was met with some scepticism and even incredulity with some colleagues and administrators doubting whether foreign scholars would bother to travel all the way to Quimper just to learn Breton, a dying language in the west of Brittany. Happily, the international interest in Breton was far greater than many imagined possible.

Fañch Postic, the Director of the Centre for Breton Oral Literature, based at the Manoir de Kernault near Quimperlé, enthusiastically supported the project and he and German decided to launch a joint project together in 2009. The classes would take place in the manor while the participants would be lodged near the St Croix Abbey Church in the heart of Quimperlé. Everything was set to go forward when, at the last minute, the city of Quimperlé cancelled the lodgings for ‘safety reasons’ thus condemning the project.

¹ The acts of the 2001 session were published by the Presse universitaire de Rennes under the direction of Joseph Rio in 2008 under the title *Mémoire, oralité, culture dans les pays celtiques*.

After a lapse of several years, German proposed the same project again in 2014. This time, for both practical and cultural reasons, he suggested that the summer school should take place at the Jakez Hélias campus of the University of Western Brittany in Quimper. With the help of David Lesvenan, the campus administrative director, both men set about laying the groundwork for project. The first step was to find appropriate hotel accommodations in the medieval heart of Quimper. After this was accomplished, they organized free public transportation to and from the university for participants. The positive reaction on the part of the CRBC colleagues who enthusiastically volunteered to offer lectures in their respective domains of specialization (cf. list below) heartened the organisers.

From the very beginning, Isabelle Le Bal, who was in charge of relations between the university and the city of Quimper, offered her whole-hearted support as well as generous financial assistance for the “Summer School in Breton language and cultural heritage studies”. German and Lesvenan also expressed their deep appreciation to the Pôle universitaire Per Jakez Helias, Quimper, the CRBC and the University of Western Brittany, Brest, for their economic support. Without their help, this project would never have seen the light of day.

The first summer school opened in June 2015 and lasted two-weeks including weekends. It was designed to provide an intensive introduction to the Breton language and culture. Mornings were devoted exclusively to Breton language learning and were comprised of an hour and a half of the grammar classes followed by an hour of conversation. The former were taught by the linguist, Tanguy Sollicec (now with the CNRS, Paris) and, as additional levels of Breton were added in the following year, by Myrzinn Boucher-Durand (currently PhD candidate at Harvard). These classes were taught through the medium of English. Malo Adeux (currently a PhD candidate at the UBO) and Stenn Charbonneau (Breton, French, and English interpreter, game designer, publisher and language games trainer) taught Breton in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

The conversation classes were taught by the *Mervent* Breton language association (*Mervent*, meaning southwest wind): Eric Labaigt, Yann Guillamot, Yann Cariou and Jean-Yves Kervarrec who coordinated the activities for this part of the course. Since 2015, other Breton teachers from *Mervent* have also participated in the program: Metig Hamo, Anjela Quere, Drian Bernier and Olier Loussouarn. Gwenole Larvol, Yann-Fulub Dupuy, Yann Cariou, and Camille Diquelou, teachers from the Diwan learning center called *Kelen*, joined the program in 2021, offering online Breton classes.

The afternoons were comprised of two and, occasionally, three hours of lectures on a variety of topics ranging from Breton history (ancient and modern), maritime culture, Breton oral and written literature, Breton dialectology, Old Breton anthroponyms and many other subjects. Many of these were presented in English

but, when non-English-speaking colleagues presented their lectures in French, they did/do so with either English language powerpoints and English-language supports. Simultaneous translation (Breton or French to English) is now provided by Myrzinn Boucher-Durand.

In the late afternoons, visits were organized to the Breton museum in Quimper, the archives of the diocese of Quimper, the *médiathèque*, which preserves precious Breton-language books such as the *Catholicon* (1499), the oldest Breton dictionary but also the oldest trilingual dictionary (Breton, Latin and French) in the world. In addition, regular outings were also organized to 16th century village of Locronan, the Paul Gauguin art museum in Pont Aven, the early 20th century Breton school of Tregarvan, the Abbey of Landevennec (founded in the 5th century by the monk from Cornwall, *Gwenolé*, i.e. *Uinuualoe*) and many other sites of interest.

Furthermore, this summer school was conceived with a new master's degree in mind. Entitled 'Celtic languages and cultures in contact', it was founded by Gary Manchec German and Héléne Tétrel. Héléne Bouget and Héléne Tétrel (both CRBC medievalists), oversaw the medieval branch of the French and Celtic studies programme while Gary Manchec German, Gaëlle Le Corre and Anne Hellegouarc'h (specialist of contemporary Anglo-Celtic literatures and cultures) were in charge of the contemporary Celtic and Anglo-Celtic aspects of the programme. Quite exceptionally, this Master was designed to offer language instruction not only in the modern and medieval Celtic languages (Irish, Welsh and Breton) but also Latin and medieval French.

One of the first immediate benefits of the initial 2015 summer school was the participation of Maxim Fomin, Reader in Irish at Ulster University. Seeing the success and enthusiasm that the project inspired, he and German decided on a closer collaboration between their respective universities. Fomin and Prof. Emeritus Séamus Mac Mathúna, also of Ulster University, as Secretary and President of the *Societas Celto-Slavica* respectively invited German to organize the 9th colloquium of the Societas in Quimper. This was held in Quimper from June 21–23, 2018 at the end of the fourth session of the Breton Summer School. The acts were later published in two volumes of the present journal as volumes 11 and 12. To this day, Maxim Fomin steers our Master's component in Irish language and literature.

As a prelude to the Celto-Slavica colloquium, German invited Steve Hewitt, an internationally-known linguist and specialist of Tregor Breton, to organize a conference on Breton grammar and syntax in which 19 internationally-known scholars participated. It was the first conference solely devoted to Breton linguistics ever organised in Brittany and took place at the Per-Jakez Hélias campus in Quimper on 19–20 June 2018.

Gary Manchec German was the Summer School director from 2015 through 2018. When he retired he asked Gaëlle Le Corre to replace him. As a specialist of

variationist linguistics and member of the CRBC, she was ideally suited for the job. Furthermore, she had participated in the project yearly from its inception in 2015. Not only did she carry the project forward but, thanks to her hard work and diligence, she saved the Summer School from extinction during the Covid crisis by organizing the Breton courses and afternoon lectures online. During this time the number of enrolments actually expanded. Gaëlle Le Corre is assisted in the organization of the program by Myrzinn Boucher-Durand and David Lesvenan. So far, the program has attracted students and researchers from all over the world specialising in not only Celtic studies but also linguistics, anthropology and an array of other disciplines. People from over twenty different nations have participated in the program, demonstrating that the Summer School is of valuable interest to the academic world.

Thanks to Maxim Fomin, Ulster University was able to secure a grant through Erasmus+ and later to its successor Turing Scheme to enable some of their students to attend the summer school in 2016—2023. It is hoped that this partnership will be further strengthened building new opportunities in teaching and research between the UBO and Ulster University.

It was following this period that German, Le Corre and Anne Hellegouarc’h decided to propose the publication of the lectures that have been given over the years by members of the CRBC. Like Le Corre, Hellegouarc’h was deeply involved in the summer school from the very beginning in 2015 presenting lectures every year on Breton culture and on the Breton and Welsh poets, Xavier Grall and R.S. Thomas.

This issue is thus the first of two volumes of acts that provides only a sample of the many lectures that have been delivered over the years. Nevertheless, it has been conceived to offer international readers a general introduction to the Breton history, literature, culture and language, hence the title, *A Window on Brittany*. Thanks to the continuing close bonds that exists between the University of Western Brittany, Brest, and Ulster University, Maxim Fomin, Research Director for Modern Languages and Linguistics at Ulster, kindly proposed that these volumes should be published in the *Studia Celto-Slavica* series.

This first volume is intended to provide an overview of the history and literature of Brittany, in the hope that the reader will be encouraged to delve more deeply into the subject. The first article by Patrick Galliou retraces the settlement of the Armorican peninsula, from the earliest attested examples of human presence left by Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers to the period of Roman occupation. Patrick Galliou challenges the common belief that the Armorican peninsula was isolated from the rest of Europe. On the contrary, as evidenced by the numerous archaeological artefacts found on the peninsula, situated at the crossing of two maritime zones, this Armorican Brittany participated fully in the great cultural and technological developments that emerged in this part of Europe.

The cross-Channel exchanges initiated in Neolithic period continued in later centuries with the migration of insular Brythons to the northern and western parts of Armorica between the 4th and 7th centuries, giving the peninsula its name — Brittany. The eastern part of Armorica, however, remained under Frankish rule. The peninsula was thus divided culturally, politically and linguistically. The western part of the territory, inhabited by small rural Brythonic²-speaking Christians, managed to remain outside the Gallo-speaking Frankish-dominated regions until the first half of the 8th century. The border with the Bretons was then materialised by the river Vilaine. Dr Patrick Kernevez examines how this initial territorial and linguistic division and the power struggles and alliances between Breton and Frankish rulers led to the emergence of a specific political organisation in Brittany, which was officially unified in 851 with the signing of the Treaty of Angers. The native Breton ruler Erispoé, who had sworn allegiance to the Frankish king Charles the Bald, became the first king of the Bretons. However, due to the subsequent Norman invasions and internal political divisions, the Breton rulers eventually lost their royal titles. By the middle of the 10th century, the political power was in the hands of Breton dukes.

The first part of this volume concludes with Yves Coativy's contribution which outlines the history of Brittany from the 13th to the 21st century. Despite internal rivalries for power and the ravages of the Black Death, the ducal political structure remained stable and Brittany's economy flourished between the 13th and 17th centuries. Far from being economically isolated, Brittany exported goods such as salt, cloth, and grain throughout Europe. However, the political autonomy granted to the Breton duchy was challenged by the French king at the end of the 15th century. The defeat of the Breton army and the subsequent marriage of Anne of Brittany to Charles VIII in 1491 led to the integration of Brittany into the French kingdom, which was completed with the Edict of Union in 1532. Later on, internal political rivalries, between the Republicans and the *Chouans*, resurfaced after the French Revolution in 1789. The 18th century also marked the decline of Brittany's economy, as the region did not participate in the Industrial Revolution. It was not until the end of the Second World War that the economic and cultural revival of Brittany really began.

In a broad sense, part two of this volume focuses on the *matière de Bretagne* (i.e. the matter of Brittany and Britain), with a first contribution by Ronan Calvez (historian and specialist of Breton literature) on 16th and 17th century Breton literature of Brittany, a body of both religious and secular works composed of mystery plays, prayers, sermons and mystic poetry, which were rediscovered and republished in the 19th century. The author argues that this literary production should be

2 Also called "Brittonic" or "British-Celtic".

reappraised and considered from several perspectives as part of a particular context of production. He describes their art as ‘the work of craftsmen’ using complex internal and external rhymes and intricate patterns of alliteration and assonance as their construction materials. Through several examples, Ronan Calvez reveals the near mathematical structure of the verse which is reminiscent of the way Italian masters would shape and structure their paintings from lines and diagonals dividing the space into geometrical shapes. Having opened our eyes to the complexity of the form, Calvez goes on to question the motivations of the authors of this body of work. Indeed, *contemptus mundi*, the vanity of Man’s life on this earth, is stressed in all the religious texts, combined with the *Danse macabre* and an all-pervasive presence of death. What is the message these texts were meant to convey to their audience? In order to consider the question, one needs to treat the texts as sources that should be considered not just in a literary and religious context, but also in an artistic, social, economic and perhaps political one as well, as will be seen in this article.

The next paper was contributed by Fañch Postic, CRBC /CNRS senior researcher and Director of the Centre for Oral Breton Literature (Manor of Kernault). Entitled ‘A Short History of Collections and Collectors in Brittany’, this article explores the long-overlooked topic of oral literature and the central role it has played in Breton literature and culture. To restore this oral literature to its rightful place, Postic examines the sources of narrative tales and asks whether the Breton-language ballads, known as *gwerziou* in Breton, were the ultimate source of a number of medieval French-language poems (such as the *Lays* of Marie de France). Although the literary elites in Paris initially snubbed oral literature, it was often members of the aristocracy who first showed an interest in this subject and pioneered the practice of collecting songs, ballads and folktales in the 19th century. Postic’s article retraces later developments in the methodologies they adopted, from the early initiatives of Bretons like La Tour d’Auvergne or Jacques Cambry whose work drew attention to the tremendous wealth which the popular memory of the peasantry had conserved. The generation of collectors that followed during the 19th century paved the way for a fast-growing corpus of oral literature. Foremost among these was Viscount Hersart de la Villemarqué, the author of the famed *Barzaz Breiz*, who had inherited his interest in oral literature from his mother, one of the precursor generation of collectors. In turn, de la Villemarqué and many others, like François Luzel, inspired successive generations of folklorists to preserve and study popular oral material. As Postic explains this fieldwork and collecting of traditional lore continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries right up to the revivalist movement of the 1970s, a movement that is still alive and well.

This paper is followed by an article written by Nelly Blanchard (specialist of 19th century Breton oral and written literature) on a closely-related topic, entitled

‘A Romantic Fiction to Reinvent Oneself’, which focuses on de la Villemarqué’s *Barzaz-Breiz* (1839–1845–1867). In this article, she argues that it would be a mistake to view this work essentially as a collection of popular ballads and invites us to consider the rest of contents of the *Barzaz Breiz* that are too often overlooked. She proposes that this work should be viewed a text in its own right, expressing and betraying the thoughts and ideology not of a mere collector, but of an *author*. In the course of her article, Nelly Blanchard argues that de la Villemarqué adopts several roles as writer, making the discourse a complex and multi-layered one: there is more to this writer than meets the eye... This paper consequently sheds light on the author whose role in structuring the themes and ideologies promoted in the *Barzaz Breiz* has since been overshadowed by the stir it caused when it was first published. Nelly Blanchard argues that this led to the hasty classification of the work as a collection of folk ballads, when it really should be analysed as a complex fiction. The subject is not so much the ballads themselves but rather the author himself, an author who shapes and moulds the image of the Breton people and the history of Brittany in a way that reveals his ulterior motives: controlling and steering the (unwitting) reader in a particular direction.

The volume draws to a close with a contribution authored by Mannaïg Thomas (specialist of contemporary Breton-language literature), entitled ‘100 years of literature in the Breton language (1920–2020)’. Her article starts with the mention of a paradox of sorts: in the more recent past, while the number of Breton-speakers has dwindled, the publication of works in the Breton language has increased, and keeps on increasing to this day, with original works as well as classics being translated into Breton, thereby giving the language a new visibility. In an overview of the Breton-language literary production over the course of a century up to 2020, the author examines the reasons behind the phenomenon, showing how Breton writing has been and continues to be conditioned by competing ideological contexts, revivalist aims and sociolinguistic issues.

