

# Plaidejat a una dama a c r freg 1: The Occitaniste Movement in France from the Third Republic to 1945

著者	Thompson Micheal
journal or publication title	Comparative culture, the journal of Miyazaki International College
number	21
page range	36-57
year	2016
URL	<a href="http://id.nii.ac.jp/1106/00000656/">http://id.nii.ac.jp/1106/00000656/</a>

# **Plaidejat a una dama a còr freg 1: The Occitaniste Movement in France from the Third Republic to 1945**

**Michéal Thompson**

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the evolution and changes experienced by the Occitaniste movement in France from the French Revolution to 1945. A subsequent article will carry it forward to the present. Following a brief introduction to the Occitan language and its history prior to the Third Republic, the central role of Frédéric Mistral and the Félibrige movement in Provence sets the stage. The first period of the Third Republic was crucial to the history of Occitan and the Occitaniste movement. The relationship of Occitania to France and of Occitanisme to the state were shaped by the actions of the state especially in the realm of education, and in the reaction of the Félibrige and others to them. A fundamental division between eastern Occitania (Provence) and western Occitania was reinforced at this time and was to have repercussions for the future history of the Occitaniste movement. The changes experienced both politically and socially during the early years of the twentieth century through the Second World War are then examined.

## **Introduction: L'occitan qu'es acquò?<sup>2</sup>**

Occitan is a Romance language, which means that it is descended from Latin (Late or Vulgar Latin). Thus it is part of the large Romance Language family including French, Castilian, Italian, Catalan and numerous others. This large family of

---

<sup>1</sup> "Plea to a cold hearted lady" - all translations are by the author.

<sup>2</sup> What is Occitan? This is both the subject of the next few pages and also of a highly successful set of informational material produced by the Institut d'estudis occitans/Institut d'Études Occitanes (IEO) whose national office is at 11 carrièra Malcosinat, 31000 Tolosa.

languages is conventionally divided along geographic lines. Occitan is certainly (and obviously) a branch of the Western Romance group. Thereafter it becomes more contentious for reasons that will be discussed. For some linguists it is part of Gallo-Romance (hence linked to France and French) while for others its links are with Catalan and by extension Castilian so it is part of Iberian Romance. It also has clear linkages with Gallo-Italic, the languages of Northern Italy, such as Piedmontese or Romagnol. The arguments are as much political as they are purely linguistic<sup>3</sup>. Irrespective of these arguments about linguistic affiliations, Occitan developed as a language in what is now the South of France around a number of cultural centers. While Tolosa<sup>4</sup> (Toulouse) is usually given pre-eminence (though not by all!) other centers such as Bordèu (Bordeaux), Limòtges (Limoges), Pau, Avinhon (Avignon), and Marselha (Marseille) among others also had their part to play. While a "common language" may have coalesced around these various centers, there was obviously a degree of accepted variation from the beginning in Occitan, which was lacking in some respects in Castilian or French or even in Catalan. Occitan has always been pluri-centric.

A large part of the reason for this lies in the question of state formation. In the milieu of Feudal Europe, a pluri-centric language like Occitan was a unifying factor. It was also a high status language used and understood in many of the courts of Western Europe. William IX (1071-1127) was Duke of Aquitaine, Duke of Gascony,

---

<sup>3</sup> At the level solely of Linguistics, the literature is very extensive. Major recent works which deserve consultation are: Pierre Bec, *Manuel pratique de philologie romane* (Paris, 1970 & 1971); Frederick B. Agard, *A Course in Romance Linguistics* [Two Volumes] (Georgetown, 1984); Peter Boyd-Bowman, *From Latin to Romance in Sound Charts* (Georgetown, 1980); and Joshua Rudder, *The Grammar of Romance* (New York?, 2012). Material specific to Occitan will be cited subsequently.

<sup>4</sup> Occitan names are given first, International (usually French) names are given in parentheses.

and Count of Poitou. Richard I (1157-1199) had all of these titles as well as being King of England. Both were prominent writers in Occitan. So, the "center of gravity" of Occitan was in the north and west of its current area. In fact, the language was often called Lemouzi (The language of the Limousin - bordering on France). William and Richard, alongside such poets (trobadors/troubadours) as Jaufré Rudel, insured that this was the case. In 1209 to 1229 (with a long aftermath) the Cathar Crusade eliminated the Limousin as a barrier and incorporated much of the Languedoc into the nascent Kingdom of France. Occitan only retained its high status in Béarn/Navarra in the southwest (until 1589), in the Comtat Venaisin (around Avignon and controlled by the Papacy) and in Provence (until 1486). Occitan thus never became a state founding language. It rapidly declined as a written language with the final blow being the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts in 1539 in which the French King Francis I legislated to abolish all languages but French in administration. Occitan was therefore set on a different trajectory from many of the other Romance languages<sup>5</sup>.

Occitan remained the language of the people but it was a largely unwritten one. When contact was necessary with the State, then intermediary translators bridged the gap. Use of the language in traditional contexts (such as the Jocs Florals - Carnivals and poetry competitions) continued, but diminished by the year. A glorious but remote past, an unwritten language of the lower classes confronting an official state language in the present, and the looming possibility of extinction in the future - this was Occitan in 1780. Certain ecclesiastics advocated the use of "patois" for pragmatic purposes, such as Bishop Alain de Solminhiac (1593-1659) who trained preachers in the language specifically in his diocese of Cahors. This continuing concern is reflected in the life of Eugèni de Mazenod (1782-1861) who founded the

---

<sup>5</sup> Though somewhat dated, the best short general history remains: Pierre Bec *La langue occitane* (Paris, 1995 [6th edition]).

*Oblats de Maria Immaculada* in 1816 largely out of concern for "the poor who spoke only the Provençal language". It is perhaps noteworthy that in many of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at this time (notably La Salette and especially Lourdes), the Blessed Virgin herself spoke Occitan<sup>6</sup>.

Those who spoke it didn't even call it Occitan but "patois" or "patoué". This "patois" was much despised by French speakers and also by many of its users. The same word was applied to all of the non-French languages and dialects of the Kingdom of France. Occitan as a concept or a clearly differentiated linguistic entity had virtually disappeared but Occitan as a reality had not. In fact it was obvious that Occitan (or as they preferred, Patois) was the only viable way to communicate the ideas of the Revolution to its numerous speakers - overwhelmingly numerous in many areas. This is what they did, and there was a brief recrudescence of Occitan as a propaganda vehicle for the Revolution<sup>7</sup>. When they did write in Occitan however, they did not use the spelling, writing, or grammar standards of classical Occitan, rather they devised a range of idiosyncratic writing systems based on the phonology of French. However, temporary expediency aside, the goals of the French Revolution were just that, French, and all forms of "patois" had no place in it. The un-modernized somewhat ramshackle nature of the Kingdom of France had provided some shelter but that was not to last long. In 1789 the Revolution had begun and its consequences for Occitan as well as for France were to prove decisive. The clarion call was the report of Abbé Gregoire to the Convention in 1794<sup>8</sup>. Based on a survey and hence on concrete data, he made clear that France was not in fact French speaking. More than

---

<sup>6</sup> See: Joachim Bouflet & Philippe Boutry *Un signe dans le ciel* (Paris, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> See: Henri Boyer et al *Le texte occitan de la période révolutionnaire* (Montpellier, 1989) and M. Carmen Alén Garabato *Quand le "patois" était politiquement utile* (Paris, 1999) - the latter concentrates on Tolosa (Toulouse).

<sup>8</sup> *Rapport sur la Nécessité et les Moyens d'anéantir les Patois et d'universaliser l'Usage de la Langue française*

50% of French citizens did not speak French at all and only 12% spoke it with any real degree of native speaker competence and exactitude. Instead most citizens spoke one of the 39 "patois" distinguished at the time. Obviously the Abbé Gregoire and indeed all of the supporters of the French Revolution believed in one national language and that it should indeed be French especially if the Revolution was to be effective, but it was to take some time for his wish to become a reality.

### **Occitan in the Nineteenth Century: Mistral and the Félibrige**

The primary key to the spread of French (and the further demise of Occitan) was its use in education and the spread of education itself throughout the country and at all social levels. The political history of post-Revolutionary France insured that this was a slow and far from smooth process<sup>9</sup>. A succession of basically conservative administrations from the Bourbon Restoration through to the demise of the Empire of Napoléon III showed varying levels of commitment to furthering the cause of universal education but none, clearly, had it as a true priority. Part of the reason for this was unquestionably to placate the various conservative and/or monarchist leaders who were concentrated in much of the Occitan area and who hankered after the "gold old days" where the traditional provinces had a greater degree of autonomy<sup>10</sup>. The Catholic Church, for good reasons, was not exactly fond of the Revolution and its legacy. They also had a particular interest in education, what was taught and by whom and a significant degree of nostalgia for Royalism in many quarters as well. The existence of significant groups of Protestants in the Occitan areas (especially the

---

<sup>9</sup> The standard (and best) analysis is still the collection of essays: François Furet & Jacques Ozouf *Lire et Ecrire: l'alphabétisation des français de Calvin à Jules Ferry* (Paris, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Brian Fitzpatrick *Catholic Royalism in the Department of the Gard, 1814-1852* (Cambridge, 1983).

Languedoc) heightened these tendencies in these areas as the Protestants were largely in favor of the Revolution, which had emancipated them from royal repression. This was not however a linguistic conflict as the Protestants had adopted French as the only official language of the church. The Catholic Church used French as the language of power but was more pragmatic in its use of Occitan, to which it was committed in practical terms (sermons and [perhaps] catechism) but was otherwise officially indifferent. Dogma mattered, the language in which it was taught less so<sup>11</sup>. These matters rested or at least only slowly changed until the advent of the Third Republic in 1871.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the pluri-centric nature of Occitan and the absence of any contemporary linguistic center or linguistic standard had resulted in a clear division of the language into six principal dialects. These dialects could be increasingly subdivided down to the village level. At their edges they also shaded off into the next dialect. While some linguists would favor nearly infinite subdivision, a basic division into six was widely accepted. In the north: Limousin, Auvergnat, and Alpin (or Gavot), which was also used across the French border in the Occitan valleys of northern Italy. In the southwest, Gascon was dominant. In the center, Languedocien and Provençal were customary and they were also, coincidentally, closer to Medieval Occitan. A number of linguistic features underlined this division into six. A number of disputes about this division (among linguists) would continue for some time and indeed continue into the present: Alpin is often claimed to be a variety of Provençal (though not always convincingly) and Gascon is

---

<sup>11</sup> The relationship of the Catholic Church to Occitan and its usage remain to be examined. These questions have been explored for Breton [See: Fañch Broudic, *La pratique du breton de l'ancien régime à nos jours* (Rennes, 1995)] and for Sard in Italy [See: Raimondo Turtas *Pregare in sardo: scritti su Chiesa e Lingua in Sardegna* (Cagliari, 2006)]. The author intends to publish an article on this question in the future.

often claimed to be a separate language altogether, as separate from Occitan in the west as Catalan is in the east. Most of these disputes can, of their nature, never be fully resolved though the admitted existence of Franco-Provençal on the one hand and the distinctiveness of Catalan on the other have at least established a geographical and linguistic limiting framework acceptable to all<sup>12</sup>.

Frederic Mistral (1830-1914) was born into an Occitan speaking milieu and Occitan was his first language. Of necessity, this was one of the six recognized dialects (in his case Provençal). He founded an association of poets in Provençal called the Félibrige in 1854 to celebrate the use and beauty of the language. Founded in the reign of Napoléon III - who was Emperor from 1852 to 1870 - his intent was not literally "reactionary" (to reverse the past) but to accept the status quo and to attempt to ameliorate it in practical terms. His aim (and that of the Félibrige more generally) was to create a space for Occitan in a modern France, which was both, unitary (to reflect the heritage of the Revolution) and yet in some sense pluri-centric (to reflect both the pre-Revolutionary past and the actuality of the present). The Félibrige was not specifically monarchist (though many of its adherents were), nor Catholic (though most of its adherents were). Neither did it oppose the Revolutionary concept of a modern, unitary nation. Rather it was regionalist (though practically right wing) seeking for a space in France for the virtues (and languages) of the past to flourish in the pragmatic environment of the present. This explains its successes and its failures. It offered a respectable platform for Monarchists and others to integrate into the state and it was obviously favorable to the Catholic Church. And yet it did not

---

<sup>12</sup> The existence of Francoprovençal (a Latin based language centered on Lyon) was first recognized by Ascoli in the 1870's. For a good summary see: Dominique Stich *Parlons francoprovençal: une langue méconnue* (Paris, 2001). For Catalan see: Antoni M. Badia Margarit *La formació de la llengua catalana* (Barcelona, 1991) and Joan Veny *Els parlars catalans* (Mallorca, 2002) which touches on the Occitan/Catalan relationship and also that between Catalan and Valenciano.



offer a challenge to the unitary French state and to concepts of social progress. In the world of Third Empire France it was both attractive and non-threatening. Its failures lie largely with it being non-practical. It was not a program to further the cause of Occitan in the schools or the workplace. There was no practical planning attached to the Félibrige, it was all poetry and no pedagogy. This was not enough in the harsher and more calculating world of the Third Republic and in confrontation with the real world of Occitan speakers.

It was, however, a platform that could embrace the range of language enthusiasts and yet was not obviously a threat to the Empire or even to the opponents of the Empire whose revolution had been thwarted<sup>13</sup>. The Empire, with its eclectic mix of nostalgia, clericalism, and the desire to rehabilitate France on the European and world stage was the perfect backdrop for the early Félibrige - impractical yet conciliatory. The Félibrige received a respectable, genteel hearing but no real action. The Félibrige (and Mistral in particular) brought Occitan into the salons of Paris. His lengthy poem *Mirèio* (published in 1857) was an instant success in these quarters. Taken up by Dumas, Lamartine, and others its blend of emotion, romance, and nostalgia was perfect for the court of Napoléon III and the Empress Eugénie. The fact that it was in Occitan, though distant recollections of the *trobadors* were positive, was seemingly irrelevant. Like Sir Walter Scott in the United Kingdom just a few years earlier, there was no intention of dealing with the contemporary existence and challenges of Occitan any more than there had been for Scots or Gaelic. It was a very socially acceptable form of Occitanisme, which was to culminate in the award of the

---

<sup>13</sup> On the early years of the Félibrige and Mistral's leading role see: Maria-Clàudia Gastou *Mistral abans Mirèio: cossi mistral prenguèt part a l'espulsion del felibrige e de l'armana provençau (1854-1859)* (Auriilac, 2012). For a good overview of the Félibrige from its beginnings to the First World War see: Philippe Martel *Les félibres et leur temps: Renaissance d'oc et opinion (1850-1914)* (Boudeaux, 2010).

Nobel Prize for Literature to Mistral in 1904. But by the time that he received his prize on behalf of a grateful French nation, times had changed for Occitan and even, to some extent at least, for Mistral and the Félibrige. After the glitter, France was to be a much more pragmatic state and the place of Occitan within it a far more contested one.

First, as Napoléon III left the international stage and the Third Republic took his place, what was Occitan? Mistral had written the language of his youth as he heard and experienced it. He had no real knowledge of classical Occitan or at least no desire to utilize it. He created an orthography based on that of French. It was realistic in terms of the spoken variety of Occitan to which he was used and it was of its nature more accessible to French speakers. His orthography, called as it should be *Mistralienne*, was based on the spoken language of Provence. True to this, the language he wrote (and which the other Félibrigiens wrote) was labeled not as Occitan but as Provençal. Due to the prestige of the Félibrige, the language as a whole was labeled as Provençal throughout most of the years of the Third Republic<sup>14</sup>. While this might, conceivably, have led to Provençal being the prestige dialect and *Mistralienne* being the prestige orthography, such was not the case. The Third Republic was not interested in stabilizing Occitan, but rather it was specifically hostile to any attempts to do so. *Mistralienne* Provençal could not serve to unite against a common linguistic enemy but rather to divide the already divided ranks of Occitania. In the initial stages this meant writing Occitan in a variety of sometimes idiosyncratic "patouissant" forms. Of their nature, this would doom Occitan to being a

---

<sup>14</sup> As examples, the most indispensable studies of Occitan dialects in the early twentieth century are: Jules Ronjat *Grammaire istorique des parlars provençaux modernes* (Montpellier, 1930-1941) and the same author's *Essai de syntaxe des parlars provençaux modernes* (Macon 1913). they both cover the whole Occitan area not just Provence.

folkloric enterprise where aging agriculturalists recounted their youths and farming practices. The Third Republic was committed to a present and especially an envisaged future in which Occitan had no real place. The challenge for the Félibrige was to reverse this and to secure that place.

The label Provençal was a particular and enduring barrier and, ironically, not a barrier intentionally created by Mistral or the Félibrige more generally. It was a barrier for the French state and a barrier for Occitan speakers as well. Mistral and the Félibrige were committed to France and to Provençal, they saw no real contradiction between them. But their conception of France and that of the mainstream of the Third Republic was a different one. Poetry was all very well and good, but what about Primary Schools? The Félibrige was suspect to the Third Republic, as its espousal of regionalism seemed to derogate from the unitary, centralizing policies of the state. While the implementation of a thoroughgoing French only policy at schools was subject to the pedagogical approaches of individual teachers and school inspectors, it was never much in doubt. The laws passed while Jules Ferry was Minister of Public Instruction in the 1880's, which made it clear that French and only French could be used to create French citizens, had underlined this. While these laws were designed for lay, state schools, they also shaped teaching in Catholic schools. Not that the Catholic Church was particularly favorable to Occitan or indeed to the Félibrige<sup>15</sup>. Doctrine was important, not the language that it was imparted in. It is debatable whether Church related school or State related schools were any different in their attitude to Occitan. The separation of Church and State aggravated the situation but perhaps fundamentally did not alter it, partly because Catholic schools continued and

---

<sup>15</sup> See: David Streight *Théodore Aubanel* (Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, 1996) in which the rigorous control over poetry written in Provençal by Aubrac [second only to Mistral] by ecclesiastical authorities is documented.

partly because of the pre-existing attitude of the Catholic Church authorities to Occitan<sup>16</sup>.

The response of the Félibrige and of Mistral was somewhat lack luster and certainly not assertive, though it became a little more so over time. In 1854 Mistral had the temerity to ask for "uno pichoto plaço au costat dou françes (a small space (for Occitan) alongside French) in the schools<sup>17</sup>. Even this was officially rejected for nearly forty years. The ideas of Frère Savinian (1844-1920) that Occitan could be used as a linguistic bridge to French were rarely considered by the Félibrige and, even in the modified form proposed by Bréal, were rejected by the Félibrige in 1890<sup>18</sup>. This began to change in the 1890's when elements of the Félibrige became more assertive and elements of the Laique opposition began to moderate their approach. Above all the Socialist politician and thinker Jean Jaurès (a native Occitan speaker) helped towards this goal. Slow and unassertive progress by the Félibrige led to little change and the rock of unbending French centralized ideas of the nation underlined this. The Catholic Church had other issues to explore and was linguistically inclined to be neutral. This was exacerbated by the separation between the Catholic hierarchy (upper to middle class French speaking careerists) and the parish clergy (locally recruited and therefore Occitan speaking, often from the more well off farmer and peasant class). The latter were severely weakened by the decline in vocations following the separation of Church and State and the loss of state revenue for the clergy<sup>19</sup>.

---

<sup>16</sup> The literature on Church-State separation in France is very extensive and there is no need to be exhaustive in a study of Occitanisme. Two essential sources are: Inédit 1905, *la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat (textes fondateurs)* (Paris, 2004) and Jean Sévillia *Quand les catholiques étaient hors la loi* (Paris, 2006). Other material is cited in previous works of the author.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Barris *Langue d'oil contre langue d'oc* (Lyon, 1978) p.53.

<sup>18</sup> See: <http://vidas.occitanica.eu/items/show/2072> and Barris (1978) p.57.

<sup>19</sup> See: Mícheál Thompson *The Geography of Recruitment to the Missions Etrangères de Paris: 1891-1941* (Miyazaki, 2001).

The perceived dilettantism of the Félibrige, while remaining the dominant discourse between Occitania (especially Provence) and Paris, was increasingly challenged. In the same way that Jaurès seemed to offer some flexibility at the level of national politics, others (especially drawn from the ranks of practicing teachers) challenged it not only in Provence but in other areas of Occitania especially Languedoc and Gasconha (Gascogne). In Languedoc Antonin Perbosc and Prosper Estieu made clear their concerns to both legitimate Occitan as a language (not a *patois*) and to insure it a place in the schools throughout Occitania. As Perbosc wrote: "Our real work is to unify the language and not just partially or artificially restore one of its dialects" - "a living Occitan language for the present, by fusing useful elements preserved in popular speech" and then using this in the school system<sup>20</sup>. Obviously, the beginnings of a fissure in the Occitaniste movement could be seen. On the one hand, the suppliant, largely accomodationist, Provençal based movement of the Félibrige and Mistral. It drew its support from the more rightwing, Monarchist, Catholic segments and concentrated on the folkloric rather than the practical and pedagogic. However, they had no traction at the national level (except for Jaurès perhaps) and had little interest in gaining it. On the other hand, a more pragmatic (in some ways) and pan-occitaniste movement was being formed largely outside of Provence (Emile Ripert was the exception<sup>21</sup>) with the intention of rooting Occitan in the public life of French citizens in the area. The differences between the mainstream Félibrige and these other tendencies were very far from complete, at least in

---

<sup>20</sup> Antonin Perbosc in *Mont-Segur* November & December 1904. See also: Christian-Pierre Bedel *L'école et l'occitan en Aveyron/L'escòla e l'occitan en Rouergue* (Villefranche-de-Rouergue, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Ripert went on to being the first-ever chair of Provençal Language and Literature at Aix-Marseille University in 1920.

Provençe. Ripert replaced Mistral after his death as a member of the Académie de Marseille in 1916 and demonstrated some markedly rightwing tendencies<sup>22</sup>.

Outside of Provençe, in the Languedoc, the Félibrige was noticeably weaker (this was even more the case in the Auvergne, Gascony, and the Limousin). In the Limousin, the chief of the Félibrige (Abbé Joseph Roux 1834-1905) was resolute in his fostering of the language, but equally resolute in labelling it as "Limousine" and not Provençal as well as his refusal to use the Mistralienne orthography. He favored a classical orthography with some modifications to reflect the phonology of northern Occitan. In the Languedoc, the Félibrige was still the standard bearer for the rights of the Occitan language but the conservative political and social views of Mistral (not to mention the more modern rightwing ideas of Ripert) were far less so. In the Languedoc, while the folkloristic side of the Félibrige was still much in evidence, the politics were more likely to be pragmatic, radical and to the left of the spectrum. Jaurès and his style of populist socialism were acceptable here in a way that they were not in Mistral's Provençe. The key event, which made this clear, was the *révolte de vigneron*s in 1907<sup>23</sup>. While a complicated series of events, the over-production of inferior wine in southern France alongside imported wine from Italy and Algeria and a variety of dubious practices had led to a virtual collapse of the viticulture industry in the Languedoc. Poverty and unemployment grew rapidly and the wine growers formed a significant, militant movement to reverse this and to assert the rights of the people. Virtually all of the vine growers were Occitan speakers. Protests culminated in a mass demonstration at Montpellier of 700,000 people. The mayor of Narbonne

---

<sup>22</sup> He spoke a eulogy at Mistral's funeral in 1914 in which he praised the Italian proto-Fascist Giuseppe Botta. He was also a prominent member of a delegation to Fascist Italy in 1920.

<sup>23</sup> For a good general overview see: Félix Napo & Rémy Pech *1907 la révolte des vigneron*s (Paris, 2007).

(Ernest Ferroul) was a major promoter and a notable member of the Félibrige and Pierre Dévoluy (capoulié or Deputy Chief of the Félibrige) was extremely active. Even the Bishop of Montpellier (Anatole de Cabrières who was a Royalist, Legitimist, and member of the Félibrige) offered at least tacit support by opening the cathedral and the churches for the demonstrators to spend the night<sup>24</sup>. Mistral and the mainstream of the Félibrige in Provence remained as detached as they could. In fact, despite Dévoluy's personal plea, Mistral refused to actively participate. This was perhaps understandable, populist workers movements had never attracted him or the Provençal Félibrige at large. His attachment to Royalism as a viable political option was only somewhat less nebulous. Mistral wrote a telegram to the demonstrators at Béziers, which perhaps encapsulated his feelings: "Long live Mother Earth and those who work it. Enough politics! Let's unite around Occitan"<sup>25</sup>. The *révolte de vigneron*s was in the end resolved but the issue of Occitan was not, not least Occitan in the schools. The various political tendencies (centralism on the left and federalism on the right) continued to negotiate with each other and between various factions and extremities. Ideology and pragmatism shifted in weight but dominated the debate. Increasing industrialization had chipped away at the edges of Occitania either directly or through the system of migrant labor whereby significant numbers of the population (initially male but increasingly both male and female) became part of the labor force of Central and Northern France. Its effects were clear in areas such as the Auvergne and the Limousin as the nineteenth century came to a close. Relentless centralization of educational curricula underlined this. The pace of slow change was inexorable but it seemed like some times resistance was possible. Jaurès appeared to offer a way

---

<sup>24</sup> Gérard Cholvy *Le cardinal de Cabrières (1830-1921). Un siècle d'histoire de la France* (Paris, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> "Vivo la terro maire e l'abitant que la boulego. Plus de poulitico! Unioun en lengo d'Oc" quoted in Claude Mauron Frédéric Mistral (Paris, 1993). p.344

from the Left for Occitan and the younger Félibrige members (largely outside of Provence) had been supportive. Noticeably Félix Gras (1844-1901) and Auguste Fourès (1848-1891) but they were dead before the *révolte de vigneron*s would have offered them an opportunity for action. But Mistral and the bulk of the Félibrige (especially in Provence) were not. The old white/red divide continued. Though Mistral had conceded the use of the word Occitan by the time of the *révolte des vigneron*s, it only became part of the statutes of the Félibrige in 1911<sup>26</sup>. Jaurès continued the battle for Occitan in the schools with an article in *La Dépêche du Midi* in 1911 but its effect was minimal - too little, too late. Even then, there was marked opposition especially from other Socialists and Radicals such as Gaston Doumergue who resented all challenges to the unitary French state<sup>27</sup>. On the eve of the First World War, Jaurès was assassinated and much of the hope he had helped generate was lost. In 1914 the pace of change suddenly accelerated with the beginnings of the First World War. In four years, when it was over, the landscape of Europe had changed and so had that of Occitanisme.

## **From 1914 to 1945: Occitan and France in Turmoil**

---

<sup>26</sup> "The term Occitanisme denotes the spiritual state of all those who aspire to serve Occitania: her language, her customs, her traditions, and who wish for her a greater independence in terms of politics, administration, and the economy" cited in Joan Larzac *Descolonisar l'istòria occitan: Tome II - l'enemic dins la clòsca* (Montpelhièr 1977). p.230

<sup>27</sup> Gaston Doumergue (1863-1937) was a long serving politician and twice Prime Minister. He helped shift the Radical Party further from the Left. He was also a native Occitan speaker. However, he wrote in reply to Jaurès: "France is one, there is only one France. Her thoughts, her feelings, her traditions are expressed through only one language: French" cited in René Jouveau *Histoire du Félibrige Tome 01 1876-1914* (Aix-en-Provence, 1970) p.407.



In 1914 the core of the Occitan world in France was still largely intact but the unidirectional process of change was very clear<sup>28</sup>. While much of the Limousin (and to a lesser extent the Auvergne) had entered the French speaking, industrialized world, even there much remained the same. What was true of the Creuse was not necessarily true of the Corrèze<sup>29</sup>. In the rest of Occitania, despite pockets of industrialization as in Carmaux and the general industrialization of viticulture, things remained much as before<sup>30</sup>. The First World War (1914-1918) mobilized millions of Frenchmen (and Occitans) into the service of the state. Those who did not directly serve were still indirectly involved in the war effort. This involved not only men but also women. The old agricultural world was irrevocably altered. There is a wealth of biographical and anecdotal evidence about change in the rural world of France and Occitania; in fact it is a large, albeit uneven, genre<sup>31</sup>. What is of interest is not the extent of change but its variability and, perhaps most importantly, the responses that it evoked. Mistral died in 1914. His world of "regionalism" based on monarchical, feudal privileges being resuscitated for the benefit of Occitan did not die with him but it retreated to its Provençal redoubt. A worthy inheritor was Baron Folco de Barocelli who carried the standards of this aristocratic Félibrige into the 1940's especially by his obsession with the Camargue and its equestrian, bullfighting

---

<sup>28</sup> The classic work is still: Eugen Weber *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, 1976) there are many substantial though less magisterial studies subsequently.

<sup>29</sup> Outstanding among the works dealing with religion (and indirectly) language in the Limousin are those of Louis Pérouas. Among his many publications the following are perhaps of most relevance: Louis Pérouas *Refus d'une religion, Religion d'un refus* (Paris, 1985) and *Le catholicisme en limousin aux xix et xx siècles a travers sa presse* (Treignac, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> See the classic work: Joan Wallach Scott *The Glassworkers of Carmaux* (Harvard, 1980). Carmaux was Jaurès's main area of political strength.

<sup>31</sup> As one, very popular, example among many see: Roger Boussinot *Vie et mort de jean chalosse, moutonnier des landes* (Paris, 1977). More outstanding, and poignant, are the various works of Marcelle Delpastre (Marcela Delpastre) in Occitan and French such as *Las vias priondas de la memòria* (Aurillac, 2001).

culture<sup>32</sup>. Outside of Provence, Occitanisme was severely weakened as it dealt with the major economic, political, and social disruptions of France from the end of the First World War until 1940.

The First World War, in France at least, was a total war. When the war began there were about 13 million active male French citizens, approximately one in ten of those were killed or disappeared (1.3 million) a further 400,000 were wounded. Seven hundred thousand widows and more than a million orphans survived the war. Occitania was very far from exempt from this and it was scarred directly. This was especially the case because 13% of the male agricultural population were killed or injured and much of the Occitan speaking areas were economically based on agriculture<sup>33</sup>. The indirect scars were perhaps to prove of even greater significance. Of the eight million non-professional soldiers mobilized for the war, more than 15% died and a further 40% were wounded. The experience of this loss directly affected Occitania but its social impact went beyond loss. Those who had been mobilized and the returned had been forcefully or otherwise thrust into a monoglot French world. Despite the horrendous nature of the war for many, it was still a shock of realization as to the nature of France and the French state and their own role within it. They returned as French speakers with most of them accepting that this was the way that the future was going. This was not just a realization for men but for women also. The war had mobilized many women and had widened the horizons of many more. Shopping catalogues were to be found in even the most remote of villages, which served to spread both the French language and fashion especially among the female population.

---

<sup>32</sup> See: Robert Zaretsky *Cock and Bull Stories* (Nebraska, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> See table in Jean Jacques Becker & Serge Berstein *Victoire et frustations 1914-1929* (Paris, 1990) p. 149.

The Catholic Church had also changed and was no longer to be relied upon to favor the interests of the old ideas of Royalism or Regionalism, though many continued to do so. Church state antagonism had centered around education and the social functions of the Church and thus had explicitly and implicitly involved the use of Patois<sup>34</sup>. It had culminated in the formal separation of Church and State and the rejection of the status quo of the Napoleonic Concordat of 1801<sup>35</sup>. This separation was brutally experienced in many areas and was to overshadow life in France, especially rural France, for at least fifteen years<sup>36</sup>. The First World War had changed this, the *Union Sacrée* symbolized the willingness of Catholics to fight alongside others for the French nation, both as soldiers and as almoners<sup>37</sup>.

Finding a new postwar *modus vivendi* was not easy but it was clearly necessary for the greater good of both parties. The institutional church favored a pragmatic solution and with the passing of the old guard in the episcopate, this was more and more possible. Charles Maurras, the founder of the right wing *Action Française* movement was a member of the *Félibrige* and active in its interests. In this he was supported by prominent clerics such as Cardinal de Cabrières<sup>38</sup>. By 1921 the Cardinal was dead and by 1926 the *Action Française* was condemned by the Papacy<sup>39</sup>. While there was much resistance to the *Ralliement* in the Catholic Church in France as a whole<sup>40</sup>, its specifically Occitan dimensions were muted to the point of non-existence. Maurras, though a Provençal *félibrigien*, was committed in his

---

<sup>34</sup> See Christian Sorrel *La république contre les congrégations* (Paris, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> Bernard Ardura et al *Le concordat entre Pie VII et Bonaparte* (Paris 2001)

<sup>36</sup> See Yves Bruley 1905, *la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat* (Paris, 2004) et Jean Sévillia *Quand les catholiques étaient hors de la loi* (Paris, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> See Nadine-Josette Chaline *Chrétiens dans la première guerre mondiale* (Paris, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> Gérard Cholvy *Le Cardinal de Cabrières (1830-1921)* (Paris, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Philippe Prévost *L'église et le ralliement* (Paris, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> André Laudouze *Dominicains français et action française: Maurras au couvent* (Paris, 1989).

opposition to the *Ralliement* by his vision of France as a whole of which Occitania (or rather Provence) was just a part. The discussion of Occitan issues was muted in the 1920's and 1930's though it was never entirely absent.

Though Maurras believed that what worked for Provence worked for France, it is noticeable that all of his postwar efforts were directed at the latter<sup>41</sup>. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, there were several small scale efforts to put Occitan on the map and to gain a place for the language in the educational system. In Languedoc, the efforts of Antonin Perbosc (1861-1944) and Prosper Estieu (1880-1939) over fifteen years led to the creation of the *Escola Occitana* in 1919. This was a break with the royalist and clericalist world of the Provençal Félibrige in a somewhat left of center Populist direction. The hegemony of Provençal was specifically challenged ("our real work is to unify the language and not the partial and artificial restoration of one of its dialects")<sup>42</sup>. His idea was not even to start from the Classical Occitan of the trobadors but rather to "forge a new language, the living Occitan of our own day, by the fusion of different usable elements preserved in our popular languages"<sup>43</sup>. This initiative was taken up by Lafore in Gascony and even by Emile Ripert (1882-1948) in the heart of the Félibrige in Provence. Their collective efforts were obviously met with less than enthusiasm by the core of the Félibrige, their reception by the French state and political parties however was hardly less frosty but it was much more decisive.

---

<sup>41</sup> Maurras "O aviá fach per Provença, e aquò serviguèt per França" quoted in Joan Larzac *Descolonisar l'istòria occitan T.ii* (Montpelhièr, 1977) p.216.

<sup>42</sup> "La vertadiera toca es l'unificacio de la lenga, e non pas la restauracion partidencas et artificialas d'un de sos dialectes" *Mont Segur* 11:November:1904.

<sup>43</sup> "Cal fargar la lenga novela, la lenga occitana viventa de nostre temps, per la fusion de tots los elements utilizables conservats dins los parlars populars" *Mont Segur* 12:December:1904.

The Third Republic after the First World War was, almost of necessity, weak and divided. The Radicals, Socialists, Communists, and various independents of the Left vied for power with over 30 Prime Ministerial terms of Office from 1919 to 1940. Occasionally, those of the Right got a short lived look in (such as the Occitan speaker Pierre Laval) who headed the National Bloc government for well under a year in late 1935. He was to achieve greater notoriety for his wartime efforts<sup>44</sup>. Both Left and Right were increasingly exposed to problems and challenges, which stretched beyond the national boundaries of France. Accordingly they became more and more internationalist in outlook and in policy decision-making. This left little time to consider "regionalist" issues such as that of Occitania. The Félibrige still dominated the language movement from its base in Provence and seemed increasingly remote from the day-to-day struggle of individuals or even political parties. It was a period of quiescence for the movement, though many hoped for better times, and Maurras even promised them. His audience was largely unreceptive however and, with the spread of more internationalist and socialist ideas through out much of Occitania (less so in Provence) his activities seemed quixotic at best and dangerously fascistic at worst. In most cases he could be dismissed as a demagogue of little relevance to the present and certainly to the future.

The advent of the Second World War shook France and Occitania out of its long malaise and, to some degree, returned them to a more pragmatic consideration of their condition. It also led to the return of old ghosts, old challenges, and a search for new solutions. The defeat of France in 1940 was, of necessity, interpreted differently by those who experienced it. The same applies to the subsequent division of France into two zones (one "occupied", the other "unoccupied"), with the exception of some

---

<sup>44</sup> See: Jean-Paul Cointet *Pierre Laval* (Paris, 1993).

coastal areas, "unoccupied France" was basically coterminous with Occitania. Surely, this represented an opportunity to be seized? Under a Conservative, Pétainist régime wasn't this was even more the case? The hopes of those on the Right seemed to have been realized and the centralist and internationalist vision of 1789 finally vanquished. Many embraced this vision, especially in Provence<sup>45</sup>. The Provençal Charles Maurras and the Auvergnat Pierre Laval once again became influential. The Société d'études occitanes (SEO) was energized behind the Pétainist banner of "travail, famille, patrie" and tentative efforts were even made to introduce Occitan into the school system<sup>46</sup>. While there was some very limited success in 1942 and a growth of Occitan reviews for the élite, the time was short and the complicity of the Félibrige with the régime too obvious for many.

In November 1942, the postwar armistice line was abandoned and the Germans occupied all of France. Outside of Provence, and even to some extent within it, the Pétainist régime was now experienced differently. Practical social disintegration and the daily deprivations of everyday life were omnipresent<sup>47</sup>. Of equal or greater relevance was the forcible recruitment (or attempted recruitment) of young men into the STO (Service du travail obligatoire), whereby 650,000 young men were sent by the Pétainist government to labor service in Germany. Those who so served from Occitania looked for a new model to express their cultural and linguistic situation from that of the Félibrige as did those who evaded such service and joined the armed *maquis* or Resistance. The SEO was discredited as to a large degree was the Félibrige outside of Provence. In the late summer of 1944 the Allies landed in Occitania with the active support of the *maquis* and the passive support of

---

<sup>45</sup> Robert Mencherini *Vichy en Provence* (Paris, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> Philippe Martel *L'école française et l'occitan* (Toulouse, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Robert Zaretsky *Nîmes at War: Religion, Politics, and Public Opinion in the Gard 1938-1944* (Pennsylvania, 1995).

much of the population. Marseille and Toulon were quickly liberated. The Pétainist/Félibrige experiment was over before it had barely begun.

The immediate consequences were obvious, the courts condemned Maurras to death, and Alibert was condemned as a collaborator, as were a number of others. The SEO was abolished and the IEO (Institut des études occitanes) was established in its place to represent Occitan linguistic and cultural interests. The focus had shifted away from Provence to the other regions, especially the Languedoc, and the emphasis was no longer conservative but radical. Real change should not have to be asked for but should be there of right. The war had discredited the conservative (or even reactionary) Félibrige but it had also disenchanted many with internationalism and ideology as well. Now was a time for concrete practical action in the context of the French state. Returnees from the *maquis* and the STO were now staffing the schools, journals, and administration. It would be a different world, with different challenges, though the old controversies were far from forgotten.