

The Chèvres and the chanter «IeAn»



Chèvre, Ea 631-1933
Kunstmuseum Den Haag,
formerly Haags Gemeentemuseum

To begin with I will, for the sake of elegance, clarify the use of the name «Chèvre» for bagpipes like the one pictured above, since there are connoisseurs who prefer the term «GCM», Grande Cornemuse à Miroirs. This term is, mildly speaking, somewhat of a misnomer, for two reasons. First, there are instruments pertaining to this same category that show no mirrors at all, and secondly, there are quite a few mirror-decorated bagpipes that do not belong to either the species of the Chèvres, nor to that of the Chabrettes.¹ If one refers to the «small bagpipes with mirrors» by their name «Chabrette»², then the larger ones, displaying a comparable organology, merit more than justly the name «Chèvre». Moreover, field research has presented evidence of the unambiguous use, in oral tradition and continuing up to our days, of precisely this name «Chèvre» in the case of the «Chèvre de Nedde»³ and the «Chèvre d'Eygurande».

In June 2016, on occasion of the «Rencontres de Chabrettes et Chabretaires» at Condat-sur-Vézère (24), organised in that year by Felicie VERBRUGGEN, I presented an informal lecture on this type of bagpipe. The pivot point of my discourse was the interpretation of an inscription found on a separate chanter that is identical to those of the Chèvres. This instrument is part of the collection of the Musée de la Musique, Philharmonie de Paris, catalogue number E. 771, known as the chanter «IeAn».



The chanter «IeAn», E. 771
Photo: J.-M. Anglès

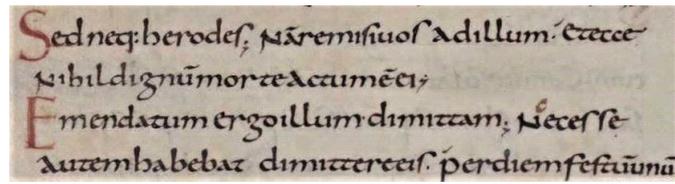
My interpretation of this inscription led to a surprising, and - so I became aware - somewhat controversial conclusion. Further research however has yielded support for this conclusion, so I consider it appropriate to resume parts of the original reasoning.



Inscription on the chanter E. 771
Photo: J.-M. Anglès 4

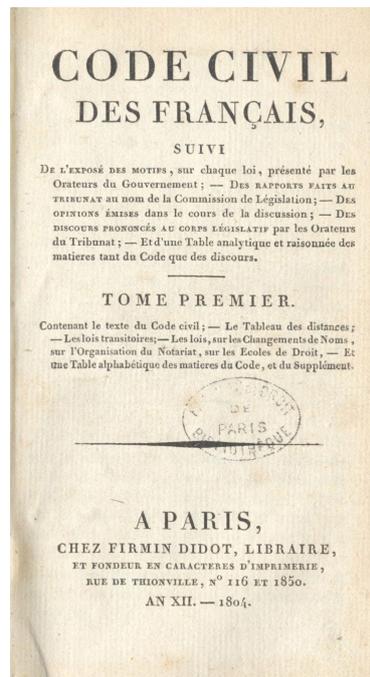
Among the connoisseurs mentioned earlier some have declared, without the slightest analysis and without reference to any source, that the above inscription is written in «Carolingian script», which is quite obviously not the case. The crossbar of the letter «e» in the inscription is horizontal and in the middle of the eye. In Carolingian script, on the contrary, this crossbar is often slanted and always situated in the high upper part of the eye. And most of the time this crossbar is prolonged to far beyond the actual width of the letter, either in a single stroke or in two separate strokes. Moreover, the «n» in Carolingian script is

usually written with *spurs*, never with serifs as in the inscription.

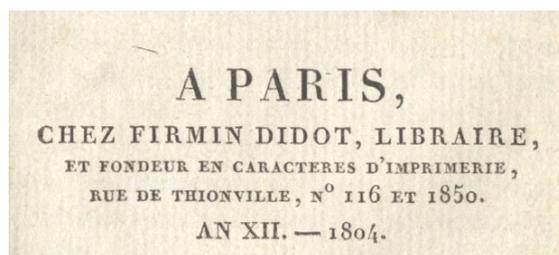


Finally, the claim that the name «Jean» can be found spelled as «Iean» only until the end of the 17th century is way too easy to refute. A certain Iean DANSARD, born in 1852, died in 1882 at Issoudun, France (36), just to give an idea. What is sometimes presented as «historical evidence» should, methinks, be taken with a grain of salt. Let us, therefore, observe the inscription more closely.

In this inscription we see four «signs» that bear a striking resemblance to characters. The emphatic use of serifs strongly suggests that this is not a sort of handwriting in the sense of running script, but rather a handwritten approximation of printing letters. In order to analyze these letters one would appreciate a means of categorizing typographic characters, preferably one that takes historical context into account. Such a means is to be found in the well-known Vox-ATypI classification of typefaces.⁵ According to this widely accepted classification these letters belong without the minutest doubt to the class of the Didone characters.⁶ Letters of this category, created in the last quarter of the 18th century, are best known for their exclusive use in the *Code Civil des Français*, of which a front page is shown here:



Superficial observation of this page immediately reveals a very interesting fact: there is no formal difference between the capital letter «I» and the number «1»:



Thus it is by all means justified to read the inscription on the chanter E. 771 as «1eAn». In this interpretation we are, of course, no longer dealing with a name. The first idea that comes to mind is that this could be a misspelled «1er An» or an abbreviation of «1e Année», both meaning «first year». What might then be a «first year» that appears written in Didone typeface? The most obvious candidate seems to me, intuitively and perhaps naïvely, the first year of the French Republican era, the year 1792.⁷

However, the most serious reproach that I have been made is, that during that era one never comes across a mention of the form «nth Year», but always, only and exclusively «Year n». Now this is where the petter meets the metre.

In 1795 Étienne LENOIR, metallurgist and toolmaker of national renown, was commissioned by De BORDA and BRISSON, delegates of the Académie des Sciences, to produce a provisional standard measure of the decimal metre length, anticipating the final results of the triangulation expedition by MÉCHAIN and DELAMBRE, spanning the trajectory between Dunkerque and Barcelona, the meridian. Decision was made to use platinum for this calibrated metre gauge because of its corrosion resistance, with some iridium added to stabilize thermal expansion. A prestigious project by all means, considered to be of great political and scientific importance. This standard metre length has been conserved first at the Archives Nationales, and later at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers. The upper side of this provisional standard gauge bears an inscription reading:

«Mètre égal à la dix-millionième partie de la distance du pôle à l'équateur, vérifiée d'après la toise de l'Académie [sic] procès verbal de ce jour. Paris le 21 prairial, An III de la République. Borda – Brisson»

[Metre equal to one ten-millionth part of the distance from the pole to the equator, as measured using the «toise» of the Académie minutes of this day. Paris prairial 21st, Year III of the Republic. Borda - Brisson] (transl. ML)

On the underside is another inscription, probably written by Lenoir:

«Étalon provisoire des mesures de la République, fait en exécution de la loi du 1er Août 1793 adopté par les commissaires chargé [sic] de sa détermination et remis par eux au Comité d'instruction publique, le 18 messidor, 3^e année»⁸

[Provisional standard for the measures of the Republic, made in execution of the law of August 1st 1793, accepted as such by the commissioners in charge of its verification and presented by them to the Comité d'Instruction publique, messidor 18th, 3rd year] (transl. ML)

Evidently the expressions «An III» and «3^e année» were used indiscriminately, even in higher circles. This finding seems to corroborate the interpretation of «1eAn» as referring to the first year of the French Republican era. Thus it is feasible to date the above-mentioned chanter E. 771 to the year 1792, the very end of the 18th century. It is most likely that the Chèvres date from this same period.

Marius LUTGERINK, aka Alain PROVISTE

*In order to protect established reputations from undue damage I have anonymised some remarks in the text. Those who know, know. Those who do not know need not do so.*ML

¹These bagpipes are characterised by their composite chanter: principal cone with fingerholes; separate, wide bell-joint; two-part key for the sub-tonic; a barrel to protect this key. The chanter stock is often decorated with mirrors.

²French for the north-Occitanian word «chabreta», diminutive of «chabra», chèvre

³Term used by M. LABRUNE, violin player and first owner of the instrument, village of Guimont, municipality of Nedde, France (87). Field research by Philippe RANDONNEIX of Limoges, France (87)

⁴https://www.europeana.eu/nl/item/09102/_CM_0162079, for the two photos of E. 771

⁵https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classification_Vox-Atypi

⁶[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didone_\(typography\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didone_(typography))

⁷In fact, the years of the Republican era started september 22nd and ended september 21st of the following year, as counted by the Gregorian calender. So, whenever the text mentions 1792, it should be read as 1792 at the earliest, and 1793 at the latest.

⁸Georg STRASSER: 'The Toise, the Yard and the Meter [...]' In: *Surveying and mapping*, vol. 35. ACSM, Washington D.C. march 1975, page 25-46



Ceci n'est pas une signature