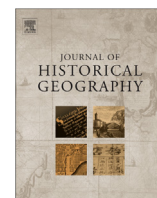




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Feature: European Geographers and World War II

## French geographers during wartime and German Occupation, 1939–1945



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## Abstract

Geographical scholarship in France enjoyed a high international reputation in the 1930s. Following German invasion in 1940, the country was fragmented into the occupied north and the 'free zone' of the south, with territorial division imposing restrictions on routine movement and fieldwork. In 1939, younger academics were conscripted, many of whom spent years in prisoner-of-war camps in Germany. Despite disruption, teaching programmes and doctoral research continued, and journals and books were published. Using biographical information, this article explores the experiences of French academic geographers. Some languished in prison and others joined the Resistance or the Free French, but the majority carried on with scholarly duties as usual. There is little evidence that geographers collaborated with occupying forces or with agents of the Vichy regime.

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War, defeat, Occupation, collaboration, Resistance, and Liberation have been used by many scholars as defining themes to explore life in France during the 'dark years' (*années noires*).<sup>1</sup> Overviews distinguish between citizens who collaborated with the occupying forces, those who joined Resistance cells, and the remainder – perhaps the great majority – who accepted harsh conditions to get by as painlessly as possible.<sup>2</sup> The lives of novelists and well-known intellectuals in the early 1940s have attracted scholarly attention

unlike the experiences of most French academics.<sup>3</sup> The varying fortunes of university geographers, high school (*lycée*) teachers, and geography students have passed relatively un-noticed.<sup>4</sup> A study of 'the Sorbonne in wartime' virtually ignored geographers.<sup>5</sup> However, two reports on academic geography in France from 1939 to 1945 appeared in 1946, and later studies dealt with school geography and with geographical periodicals.<sup>6</sup> Parisian geographers devoted two study days in 2009 and 2010 to the fate of their

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<sup>1</sup> F. Bédarida and J.-P. Azéma, *France, les années noires*, 2 Vols., Paris, 1993; J. Jackson, *France, the Dark Years, 1940–1944*, Oxford, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> P. Burrin, *Living with Defeat: France Under the German Occupation, 1940–1944*, London, 1996, 3; P. Claval, Géographie et fascisme en France durant l'entre-deux-guerres, in: P. Claval (Ed), *La Géographie au temps des la chute des murs*, Paris, 1993, 71–91, 73; R. Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation of France, 1940–45*, London, 2002, 1–19.

<sup>3</sup> A. Mitchell, *Nazi Paris: The History of an Occupation*, New York, 2008, 32; Burrin, *Living with Defeat* (note 2), 306; A. Gueslin (Ed), *Les Facs sous Vichy*, Clermont-Ferrand, 1994; A. Betz and S. Martens (Eds), *Les Intellectuels et l'Occupation: collaborer, partir, résister*, Paris, 2004; P. Baert, The power struggle of French intellectuals at the end of the Second World War, *European Journal of Social Theory* 14 (2011) 415–435; G. Hirschfeld and P. Marsh (Ed), *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940–1944*, Oxford, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> A. Meynier, *Histoire de la pensée géographique en France*, Paris, 1969, 117; M. Heffernan, Geography, empire and National Revolution in Vichy France, *Political Geography* 25 (2005) 731–758, 733.

<sup>5</sup> G. Mathieu, *La Sorbonne en guerre, 1940–1944*, Paris, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> J. Gottmann, French geography in wartime, *Geographical Review* 36 (1946) 80–91; A.-V. Perpillou, Geography and geographical studies during the war and the occupation, *Geographical Journal* 107 (1946) 50–57; J.-P. Chevalier, Education géographique et Révolution Nationale. La géographie scolaire au temps de Vichy, *Histoire de l'Éducation* 113 (2007) 1–25; L. Beauguitte, *Un champ disciplinaire à l'épreuve de la Seconde guerre mondiale: les revues de géographie française de 1936 à 1945*, Mémoire de Master (Géographie), Université de Paris VII, 2007; L. Beauguitte, Publier en temps de guerre: les revues de géographie française de 1939 à 1945, *Cybergeo* 428 (2008) 1–16.

discipline during the early 1940s, but their deliberations remain unpublished.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the experience of World War I when French academics prepared maps and reports on arenas of war, or that of British and American geographers during World War II when many were involved with intelligence work, the ‘dark years’ did not generate a major geographical project in France or create a special collection of documentation.<sup>8</sup> The present study assembles fragments of biographical information gleaned from doctoral monographs, obituaries and memorial essays to trace ‘minor’ historical geographies of individual lived experiences and also to chart the bigger picture of the academic discipline in France during this often overlooked time of war and Occupation.<sup>9</sup>

When he left Cambridge after the 12th International Geographical Congress in July 1928, Emmanuel de Martonne (1873–1955), senior professor of geography at the Sorbonne and son-in-law of Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918), determined that his countrymen would do better when they hosted the 13th Congress in Paris in August 1931. As general secretary of the International Geographical Union (1931–1938), he had overall responsibility for that meeting as well as for sessions on physical geography. Complementing these, his colleague Albert Demangeon (1872–1940) organized sessions on human geography. An impressive array of French publications was displayed, including issues of the *Annales de Géographie* and journals of provincial geographical societies, volumes of the *Géographie Universelle* (conceived by Vidal de la Blache and edited by Lucien Gallois (1857–1941)), recent doctoral monographs, the first sheets of the *Atlas de France*, and numerous textbooks.<sup>10</sup> Excursions enabled foreign visitors to appreciate the geography of several regions of France. Running concurrently with the widely popular *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* but without a delegation from Germany, the 13th Congress was judged a success and served as a model for future meetings.<sup>11</sup>

All this geographical activity was poised on a dangerously slender base, involving two or three academic patrons. Throughout the 1930s, geography was taught in seventeen state universities in France (including Algiers) by a score of professors and a handful of assistants (Table 1).<sup>12</sup> Most geographers in provincial universities operated single-handed and covered all aspects of the subject that comprised a quarter of the combined degree in history and geography, there being no special degree in geography at this time.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, history and geography were taught in a single, combined syllabus in *lycées*, with history occupying the lion’s share.<sup>14</sup> The *Institut de Géographie* of the University of Paris (the Sorbonne) was the main exception to the norm, with four full professors, a senior lecturer and two assistants in 1939 (Fig. 1).<sup>15</sup> Both de Martonne (then aged 66) and Demangeon (aged 67) were direct

**Table 1**  
Teachers of geography in French state universities, 1939.

Universities	Professors	Lecturers & Assistants
Paris	Emmanuel de Martonne (P)[66] Albert Demangeon (P)[67] André Cholley (P)[53] Charles Robequain (G)[42]	Marcel Larnaudé [59] Pierre Birot (P)[30] Jean Gottmann [24]
Aix-en-Provence	Ernest Bénévent (G)[56]	
Algiers	Robert Capot-Rey (P)[42] <sup>a</sup>	Jean Despois (P)[38]
Besançon		
Bordeaux	Henri Cavaillès (P)[69]	Paul Marres (P)[46]
Caen	René Musset (P)[58]	
Clermont-Ferrand	Philippe Arbos (G)[57]	
Dijon	Georges Chabot (P)[49]	
Grenoble	Raoul Blanchard (L)[62] Maurice Pardé (G)[46] Roger Dion (P)[43]	Henri Onde (G)[39] André Lequeux
Lille	André Allix (G)[50]	Maurice Zimmermann [69]
Lyon	André Gibert (P)[46]	
Montpellier	Jules Sion (P)[60]	
Nancy	Jules Blache (G)[46]	
Poitiers	Théodore Lefebvre (P)[50]	
Rennes	André Meynier (P)[38]	
Strasbourg	Henri Baulig (P)[62]	
Toulouse	Daniel Faucher (G)[57]	Georges Jorré [39]

University awarding doctorate: Paris (P), Grenoble (G), Lille (L); age in 1939 [ ].

<sup>a</sup> Geography was taught at Besançon by Edmond Préclin (1888–1955), professor of modern history. Source: Anon., Liste des membres, *Bulletin de l'Association de Géographes Français* 118 (1939) 15–31.

disciples of Vidal de la Blache and were acknowledged leaders of the subject with the largest cohorts of geography students and doctoral candidates in France (Table 2). Together with Gallois and Emmanuel de Margerie (1862–1953), they edited the *Annales de Géographie* and were writing the culminating volumes on France for the *Géographie Universelle*. Demangeon also edited a collection of geography books for publisher Armand Colin. Fellow Sorbonne professors, André Cholley (1886–1968) and Charles Robequain (1897–1963) had yet to make their mark as doctoral patrons. In the provinces, only Raoul Blanchard (1877–1965) at the *Institut de Géographie Alpine* in Grenoble supported an important cluster of research students.

### German invasion and Occupation

France and Great Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, following the German invasion of Poland. Alsace was threatened by immediate Occupation, and the citizens of Strasbourg were moved into the French interior. The city’s students and university teachers were evacuated to Clermont-Ferrand, where

<sup>7</sup> Epistémologie et Histoire de la Géographie (EHGO), Université de Paris 1, Journées d’études: Géographes et géographie française à l’épreuve de la seconde guerre mondiale, 30 October 2009 and 9 November 2010.

<sup>8</sup> A. Bellot, *Rapport sur les travaux exécutés du 1<sup>er</sup> août 1914 au 31 décembre 1919: Historique du Service Géographique de l’Armée pendant la Guerre*, Paris, 1936, 208–219; P. Boulanger, *La Géographie militaire française, 1871–1939*, Paris, 2002, 593–595; M. Heffernan, Geography, cartography and military intelligence: the Royal Geographical Society and the First World War, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21 (1996) 504–533; M. Heffernan, The politics of the map in the early twentieth century, *Cartography and Geographical Information Science* 29 (2002) 207–226; W.G.V. Balchin, United Kingdom geographers in the Second World War, *Geographical Journal* 153 (1987) 159–180; H. Clout and C. Gosme, The Naval Intelligence Handbooks: a monument in geographical writing, *Progress in Human Geography* 27 (2003) 153–173; A. Maddrell, The ‘map girls’. Women geographers’ war work 1939–1945, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33 (2008) 127–148; A. Maddrell, *Complex Locations: Women’s Geographical Work in the UK, 1850–1970*, Chichester, 2009; M. Rössler, Geographers and social scientists in the Office for Strategic Services (OSS) 1941–1945, *Netherlands Geographical Studies* 206 (1996) 75–85.

<sup>9</sup> J. Jackson, Mal embarqué bien arrivé: the strange story of François Perroux, in: H. Diamond and S. Kitson (Eds), *Vichy, Resistance, Liberation*, Oxford, 2005, 155–169.

<sup>10</sup> M.-C. Blanc-Chaléard, La vision du monde dans les manuels de géographie français autour de la seconde guerre mondiale, *L’Espace Géographique* 17 (1988) 289–298.

<sup>11</sup> J.-F. Chanet, Les géographes et la question de l’avenir des campagnes françaises, in: Gueslin (Ed), *Les Facs sous Vichy* (note 3), 9–22, 9; P. Claval and A.-L. Sanguin, Un demi-siècle de géographie française, 1918–1968, in: P. Claval, A.-L. Sanguin (Eds), *La géographie française à l’époque classique, 1918–1968*, Paris, 1996, 7–12, 8; M.-C. Robic, A.-M. Briand and M. Rössler, *Géographes face au monde*, Paris, 1996, 241–252.

<sup>12</sup> N. Broc, Homo geographicus, *Annales de Géographie* (hereafter AG) 52 (1993) 225–254; Beauguitte, *Un champ disciplinaire* (note 6).

<sup>13</sup> M. Chevalier, Les géographes français dans l’entre-deux-guerres, in: Claval, Sanguin (Eds), *La géographie française* (note 11), 17–26, 18.

<sup>14</sup> R. Marconis, Les relations entre la géographie et l’histoire, in: Claval, Sanguin (Eds), *La géographie française* (note 11), 59–68.

<sup>15</sup> E. de Martonne, Institut de Géographie, rapport pour l’année scolaire 1937–38, *Annales de l’Université de Paris* 14 (1939) 179–186, 180.

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