

Institutional memory: the Livre d'Or of the Toulouse Faculty of Law

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From the very beginning of a war that was quickly imagined victorious, the loss of life proved to be immense and, to keep the accounts up to date, no one waited for the law of October 25, 1919 "relative à la commémoration et à la glorification des morts pour la France au cours de la Grande Guerre [relating to the commemoration and glorification of those who have died for France during the Great War]" providing for the constitution of a *Livre d'Or*, which was to list the names of the sons of each commune who took part in the conflict. For financial reasons, the planned 120 volumes would not see the light of day. Like many other institutions, the Toulouse Faculty of Law quickly took the initiative to draw up the "glorieuse et funèbre [glorious and funerual]" list of its students killed in combat and, on December 2, 1918, Dean Maurice Hauriou could announce to his colleagues that "les dossiers [...] sont à peu près réunis [the files [...] are almost all gathered]". A commission composed of three professors was therefore responsible for overseeing the publication operations of the book which would count 227 records and appear in the form of a large volume bound in brown leather, the first cover page adorned with a headband of golden flowers and enriched with a passage borrowed from the Aeneid: *Manibus date lilia plenis*, "Give lilies with full hands".

Started early, as Dean Hauriou began to contact the families in 1917, the task would not be completed until 1924. It proved to be much more difficult than it might have seemed at first, especially since, at first, the faculty considered listing, with a photograph of each of them, not only those who died in service or were missing, but also those who suffered only injuries; this project would finally be abandoned. In addition, there was a will to use the word "student" in a broad sense not limited to those who were attending the courses of the faculty when they donned the uniform, but also including alumni who had left its halls and started their professional life for sometimes many years, whose trace had often been lost. Finally, inscription in a *Livre d'Or*, just like on a war memorial, assumes that precise criteria are to be met. The law of July 2, 1915 provided, with retroactive effect to August 2, 1914 (therefore on the day of the general mobilization), that the mention "mort pour la France [died for France]" must, upon approval of the military authority, be included on the death certificate of the individuals who died as a result of the war, in the listed circumstances: civilians and military killed by the enemy, who died as a result of their injuries or diseases contracted while providing care to wounded or sick military personnel. It is supplemented by the law of 28 February 1922 which includes military personnel "morts de maladie contractée en service commandé, ou encore des suites d'accidents survenus en service ou à l'occasion du service, en tant de guerre [who died of illness contracted on commissioned duty, or as a result of accidents occurring in service or on the occasion of service, as a result of war]" and specified that, when the death certificate "ne contiendra pas, par erreur administrative, omission ou toute cause la susdite mention [does not contain, by administrative error, omission or any cause the aforementioned mention]", the civil registrar must, upon approval of the military authority as well, record it in the margin of the document. So many precautions that would not erase all difficulties. Marc Araou's case is a perfect illustration of this. In May 1917, while trying to land his fighter plane suffering from an engine failure, he flew into telegraph lines. The aircraft crashed but the pilot escaped alive and, while heavily bruised,

resumed his combat missions. Suffering from internal lesions, he quickly gave up; evacuated, he finally died at home in Béziers on May 22, 1919, at the age of 23. Had he indeed "died for France"? would the administration wonder at length, even though he was cited at the order of the division and posthumously decorated with the military medal, since the death certificate did not indicate it and the town hall of Béziers had simply declared that he "avait été réformé temporairement et serait mort de maladie contractée en service [had been temporarily reformed and would have died of illness contracted in service]". Despite the impatience of Dean Hauriou who, on February 28, 1922, noted that, if he had died of illness contracted in service, he did indeed meet the conditions required by law, the Béziers civil registry resisted; the death certificate was silent and, if the young man "actually died" in the circumstances provided for by the texts, it was up to his family, duly provided with the military approval, to apply for registration. Marc Araou eventually appeared in the *Livre d'Or*; the administrative delays, however, meant that, despite the request still made by his father on January 17, 1924, his name would not be inscribed on the monument of the law students who died for France: "Trop tard. Plus une seule place [Too late. There's no room left]", noted the secretary of the faculty on his file.

Accompanied by a standard letter signed by Dean Hauriou, the information was collected by sending a detailed questionnaire to the families, containing 15 headings: name, given names, date and place of birth, civilian situation on the day of mobilization, regiment (or formation) to which the student belonged, military rank on the day of mobilization, rank promotions obtained and dates of promotion, military rank on the day of death or injury or decoration or citation, combat in which he took part, place where he fell or was wounded, injuries received, citations obtained, decorations awarded, works he published before or during the war, indication of the notices that were written on him or on his works. The fact sheet was meant to be completed by the soldier's father, mother, guardian or brother. While the answers most often came from fathers, the closest relatives did not always find the courage to revive their sorrow by immersing themselves in the rereading of essential documents or by taking the necessary steps. Others stalled for so long that their son's name did not appear in the *Livre d'Or*; the file of Melchior Ferrand, killed on December 20, 1914, was not sent back to the faculty until May 15, 1924, his father moreover providing only "incomplete information" because, he argued, his son "se trouvait à cette époque dans un régiment qui ne comptait personne du pays [was at that time in a regiment that had no locals]" (in this case Saverdun), while "ses chefs [sont] tombés en même temps que lui [his superior officers fell at the same time as him]". Then came a grandfather, an uncle, a friend, a comrade in combat, the one who followed the deceased in the positions he held before the war, a former fellow disciple, a colleague, or even, in one case, a former fallen student's remarried widow's sister. Strangely enough, the document was sometimes passed on to the student who responded himself, either from the front or after the war when he survived. In the absence of a response or when attempts to locate a family member failed, a proper survey of the civil and military administrations had to be carried out. Such was the case, among other examples, of Ferdinand Ducassou, born in Carcassonne on November 27, 1885 and who had only sat the benches of the faculty during the academic year 1910-1911. It is known, from a brief note provided by "Maître Marignac, ancien huissier de justice [à Toulouse] qui avait cédé sa charge, peu de temps avant la guerre, à M. Ducassou et a dû la reprendre en attendant de lui trouver un nouveau titulaire [Maître Marignac, former bailiff [in Toulouse] who had ceded his office, shortly before the war, to M. Ducassou and had to take it back while waiting to find him a new holder]", that he "a pris part aux combats de Verdun [took part in the fighting in Verdun]", was seriously wounded there at an unknown date and that he died of his wounds at the military hospital of Marseille on March 3, 1920. All this required confirmation. As "il habitait Toulouse depuis longtemps [he had lived in Toulouse for a long time]", Dean Hauriou was therefore close to the civil registry services of Toulouse, which had no trace of a transcript of death. At

the same time, the administration of the 217th heavy artillery regiment, in whose ranks Ducassou had been serving when he was wounded, was contacted. Another failure: the person concerned being "inconnu dans les contrôles du Corps [unknown to the controls of the Corps]", it was necessary to address "the recruitment of Carcassonne" or that of Toulouse depending on whether he was domiciled in one or the other city at the time of his incorporation. The competent interlocutor duly contacted would then be responsible for forwarding the request "au Corps ou l'intéressé comptait lors de son décès [to the Corps in which the person concerned was serving at the time of his death]". The faculty got on it without delay, and suffered a second failure. Following new research, it finally turned out that when Ferdinand Ducassou had been called up for military service in 1906, he depended on the subdivision and therefore on the "recruitment" of Marseille, which, by confirming the date and place of death, indicated that he had been incorporated into the 13th dragoon regiment, a unit he had joined on August 2, 1914 before being assigned to the 17th train reserve regiment and, finally, to the 57th heavy artillery regiment; the file was finally completed... in early April 1922.

In many cases, families did not limit themselves to the brief information requested by the faculty. Painstakingly, they would put together voluminous files including excerpts from letters sent from the front by their children, testimonies from comrades in combat or hierarchical superiors, obituary published in the local press or a professional magazine, announce deaths accompanied by patriotic engravings, etc. On several occasions, real pamphlets were attached, sometimes comprising dozens of pages, published independently and tracing in detail the life of the young man in question. It would then be necessary to carry out a patient work of synthesis, culminating in the drafting of the individual notice appearing in the *Livre d'Or*; in short, it would be limited to essential indications: name, given names, date and place of birth, education and degrees, sometimes the profession, rank and unit, date and place of death, extracts of quotations and mention of possible decorations. All this, not without some omissions and mistakes. Among the latter, the most flagrant regarded Joseph-Noël (Édouard, Anselme, Simon), killed in the Somme "entre Cléry et Maurepas [between Cléry and Maurepas]", without it being precisely known where, without mentioning his rank and the unit in which he served; he appears in the *Livre d'Or* as well as on the monument to the dead of the Great War of the faculty under the name Simon (Édouard, Anselme). It is true that he was born far from the mainland, in Martinique, in the town of Lamentin and that the faculty was satisfied with the very fragmentary and erroneous information transmitted by the commander of the recruitment office of the West Indies. We must therefore refer to the list of those who died for France engraved on the monument of his hometown which, for its part, was not mistaken, to restore his true identity.

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