

## Interview with Daniel BLOCH on July 5, 2018 Paris, France

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Daniel Bloch was born on March 11, 1926 in Strasbourg, France, to the famous medieval historian, Marc Bloch, and Simone Vidal Bloch. He was the fourth of six children: Alice was the eldest, then came Etienne, Louis, Daniel, and a younger brother and sister. Although both of his parents were Jewish, they did not practice the religion and did not follow rules for keeping kosher, celebrate the Jewish holidays, or attend services. None of the boys celebrated their bar mitzvah, though they were circumcised. He never even saw a synagogue until the war-years. His father wrote in "Strange Defeat", a text which analyzed why France fell to the Germans in 1940, published posthumously in 1946:

*"I am Jewish, if not by the religion, which I do not practice at all - any more than any other religion - but by birth.....I never mention my family roots except when confronted with an anti-Semite."*

Daniel says that he was never confronted with antisemitism while he was growing up.

At one point, he attended a Montessori school outside of Paris, near Clamart. He remembers attending with the son of the famous Dadaist artist, Tristan Tzara, the son of Professor Langevin, and two Rothschild daughters.

Daniel had a special relationship with his father because, as he readily admits, he was the "black sheep" of the family and, contrary to his brothers and sisters, did not do well in school, but was more interested in exploring nature and possessed manual skills. When they traveled, his father often took him to the various churches along the way, explaining the difference between Roman and Gothic architecture. His father's specialty was the Middle Ages, and agriculture and the associated professions were important to him.

When France declared war on Germany in September, 1939, Marc Bloch volunteered to serve in the army, although he was 54 at the time and had already been decorated when he served in World War I. At the same time, practically the entire civilian population of Strasbourg was evacuated. Their apartment at 59, allée Robertsau ([http://www.archi-wiki.org/Adresse:59 All%C3%A9e de la Robertsau \(Strasbourg\)](http://www.archi-wiki.org/Adresse:59>All%C3%A9e%20de%20la%20Robertsau%20(Strasbourg))) later became Gestapo headquarters. A garage behind the property was used for torture.

The Blochs went to their country home in the Creuse, in a village called "Les Fougères". No one on the family knew where Marc Bloch was, or what he was doing. As an officer, he was responsible for coordinating supplies for the tanks and trucks, especially gas and oil. Evacuated to England from Dunkerque, he returned to France and although he was Jewish, he was allowed to keep his professorship at the University of Strasbourg, which had been moved to the city of Clermont-Ferrand, because Jérôme Carcopino, State Secretary in charge of Public Education, intervened on his behalf. The family lived in the suburbs, in a village called Chamalières, but soon, Daniel and his siblings were dispersed to other places.

After a year in Clermont-Ferrand, the family moved to Montpellier, because Simone, Daniel's mother, was in poor health and apparently, the climate was better for her there.

Someone (it is not clear who, though Daniels guesses who it might be) helped to send Daniel's elder brothers, Etienne and Louis, to England, where one worked with the BCRA (intelligence operations of the Free French) and the other joined the Division Leclerc.

Daniel mentions that he was sent to work at a farm, taking care of chickens. It is not clear if this was before or after he was enrolled in a "*ferme-école*", an agricultural school on a farm. It was one of those founded by Henri Queuille, a major political figure who created these institutions. It was called "l'Ecole d'agriculture de Neuvic d'Ussel" in the Corrèze. It was here that he experienced anti-Semitism for the first time, which he explains in the interview.

At one point, Daniel made it known that he wanted to join the resistance. He was "handled" by the sister of Alexander Parodi (magistrate, political figure in the Radical-Socialist Party, and resistance fighter), Jacqueline. He waited in a safe-house for several weeks and then was assigned to a particular *maquis*. It was the largest resistance group in the *département* of the Cantal. In June, 1944, this group was instrumental in slowing down the SS Das Reich Division as it raced across France, trying to reach Normandy. This occurred at the battle of Mont Mouchet [PF: June 10<sup>th</sup> + 11<sup>th</sup>, 1944], a mountain plateau situated between three *départements* (the Haute-Loire, the Cantal, and the Lozère).

It is not clear when he found out, but his uncle (Marc Bloch's brother) was executed in Brantôme, outside of Limoges, in 1942 or 1943. He was responsible for an entire resistance network. Although Daniel did not know what his father was doing, he did know that Marc was going by the last name of "Narbonne" in the resistance. Daniel adopted the same last name for his fake identity papers.

Sometime in June or July, 1944, someone in Daniel's resistance network said that there was a message for him. They took him aside and informed him that his father had been executed before a firing squad with others. Marc Bloch had been arrested several weeks before, interrogated, and tortured by Klaus Barbie at the Fort of Montluc in Lyon. His wife Simone was hospitalized and died on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1944, not knowing her husband's fate.

Daniel remained with his group and said that he was either in Saint-Flour, Clermont-Ferrand, or la Panisse when Paris was liberated in August, 1944. He joined the 150<sup>th</sup> regiment headed by Général Delattre de Tassigny, which was known as the "Red Devils of Colmar".

During the battles and sieges to win back Alsace-Lorraine, Daniel was literally wading in mud for weeks on end. His feet were frost-bitten and he was sent to a hospital in Issoudun, where he was almost amputated. He later was recognized by a relative who was a doctor and sent to be cured in a hospital outside Paris. Once he was well again, he volunteered to remain with the French army in occupied Germany in 1946. Because of his injuries, he was a chauffeur, assigned to the famous General Koenig. He readily volunteered for the most dangerous and daring assignments, sending secret messages between Berlin and Baden-Baden, the center of operations for the French sector. He mentions that because there was the figure of a stork on his jeep (emblem for General Koenig and Alsace-Lorraine), people were obliged to help him carry-out his order of mission, without questioning him.

Back in Paris in 1946, but still a minor, he was under the tutelage of his older sister, Alice. The family apartment on the rue de Sèvres was near the Hôtel Lutétia, the administrative center where people who had been deported were sent when they returned to France. He was an adult and wanted to live his own life, so he chafed under this arrangement.

He became an assistant photographer at the newspaper *Combat* and special assistant to the editor-in-chief, Albert Camus. Daniel says he had no idea that Camus was a famous philosopher. He knew he wrote books and plays, but was unaware of Camus's international reputation. Camus treated him like a son and was his mentor.

He had a second mentor, Pierre Lazareff, the publishing magnate, at *France-Soir*, where he also worked in the photo department.

From 1960 to 1962, Daniel Bloch received a stipend from the Harkness Foundation to study in the United States. At one point, he met Nelson Rockefeller and was asked to accompany him on some of his travels. He found that this period opened up opportunities for him on his return to France.

A third mentor was Roger Bordas, who was chief of staff of René Mayer, political figure and briefly head of the French government in the 1950's. Bordas also was in charge of special programming at the ORTF, the French national television system.

When Bordas was appointed General Commissioner for the World's Fair to be held in Montreal, Canada in 1967, Daniel Bloch followed him there.

Daniel describes his 20 years in Canada, taking various jobs, one of which was managing the construction of roads from a dam to the Bay of Saint-James. Another involved Iran – perhaps starting when he helped out at the Iran Pavillon at the Fair - where he worked for the Shah's brother-in-law. However, in 1979, when the Shah was overthrown, he was never paid and lost any pension he might have claimed.

He returned to France in 1984, preparing the various Canadian cemeteries in England, The Netherlands, and France for Canadian visitors during the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Normandy landing.

Daniel Bloch was also involved in public relations at the Cannes Film Festival for many years, and was asked to organize a similar festival in the Soviet Union.

In 1988, he retired and moved to Spain, near Valence, where he lives today.

Daniel has done quite a lot to try to preserve his father's memory, but there seems to have been friction in the family about who is the rightful heir to this memory.

His eldest brother, the judge Etienne Bloch, who wrote a book called "*La biographie impossible*", has passed away, but his son has refused to let historians see the archives that remain, or entrust them to a public institution for preservation. However, part of Marc Bloch's lectures and notes are at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.

Daniel was also instrumental in having the University of Strasbourg be given the title "University Marc Bloch".

Daniel has campaigned to have his father's remains brought to the Pantheon, as the remains of other resistance fighters and political figures have been (under De Gaulle, the remains of Jean Moulin; under François Hollande, those of Pierre Brossolette, Jean Zay, Geneviève De Gaulle-Anthonioz, and Germaine Tillon). The current Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, graduated from the elite *Ecole Normale de l'Administration*, in the class that took the name "Marc Bloch", so he is in favor of this initiative.