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Rock, J.

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Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe

Diez, Friedrich Christian

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Author: Rock, Jan

Friedrich Christian Diez (c. 1850)

Title: Diez, Friedrich Christian

Friedrich Christian Diez (Giessen 1794 – Bonn 1876) was born into a family of theologians, judges, and government officials. He was trained in Classical philology between 1811 and 1816 at the university of his native town. As a student he voluntarily took up arms against Napoleon (1814) and joined the *Schwarzen* of the *Teutschen Lesegesellschaft*. He redirected his studies towards modern languages at the university in Göttingen (1816-18) and translated Byron's *The corsair* and *Lara*. After having been a private tutor in Utrecht and a *Privatdozent* back in Giessen, he obtained a doctoral degree in 1821 for his translation of *Altspanische Romanzen*. From 1825 on he was Professor in Italian, Spanish and Portuguese at the university in Bonn; in 1830 he was appointed to the first existing Chair in [Romance Philology](#), at the same university.

Diez's interest in medieval Romance literature was aroused by Jacob [Grimm](#), with whom he entered into correspondence in 1817, by a meeting with [Goethe](#) in Thüringen (1818), who directed his attention towards Provençal, by A.W. [Schlegel](#)'s linguistic study of Occitan, and by [Raynouard](#)'s 1820 edition of [Troubadour poetry](#). He saw some of such poems for himself in manuscript during a visit to Paris (1824) and printed them as *Die Poesie der Troubadours* (1826). This edition was followed by historical-genetical studies: *Die Poesie der Troubadours* (Zwickau 1826; 2nd ed. Leipzig 1883; translated by Roisin in French, 1845) and *Leben und Werke der Troubadours* (Leipzig 1829, 2nd ed. 1882).

These studies marked a shift in his interests from aesthetic appreciation to philological analysis, and led him to dedicate his life to Romance philology. Most important were his seminal *Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen* (3 vols., Bonn 1836-44, with later re-editions; English tr. 1862; French tr. 1872-76) and *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der romanischen Sprachen* (2 vols., Bonn 1853; 3rd ed. 1869-70). In both, Diez followed the historical-comparative method introduced by Grimm, enabling him to emphasize paleo-Germanic elements in Romance languages. While keeping a clear eye for

8/7/2020 exceptions to the linguistic laws (often attributed by him to euphony or *Zweckmäßigkeit*), his classification of the Romance languages into Italian, Spanish-Portuguese and French-Provençal tended to compartmentalize fluid dialect variants into fixed categories. Next to these linguistic milestones, Diez continued his work as a textual critic, publishing a text corpus with glossaries in old Romance (1846, 1852, 1865) and a Portuguese literary history (*Über die erste portugiesische Kunst- und Hofpoesie*, 1863).

Diez's contribution to Romance philology is often called *epochemachend*, though his influence only started belatedly after 1865, in part through his students who helped to break the dominance of Classical languages in France. Among these were Hugo [Schuchardt](#) and Gaston [Paris](#), who co-founded the scientific journal *Romania* (1872). An international *Diez-Stiftung* was founded in Berlin in 1880.

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