

## FORUM

### Self, Family, Religion, and Society: New Directions in *l'Histoire Moderne* in France

---

#### Introduction

*Michael P. Breen*

In June 2011 *Histoire, économie, et société* (*HES*) published a special issue devoted to recent scholarship by North American historians of early modern France.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of that issue, which grew out of my discussions with François-Joseph Ruggiu (Université de Paris–Sorbonne, Paris IV), was to reinforce and renew the proud tradition of scholarly interaction and fruitful intellectual exchanges that have marked the relationship between French *modernistes* and their North American colleagues for decades. Our concern was that, while French historians had long seen their North American colleagues as peers and engaged their work with great interest, this transatlantic scholarly community was in danger of fragmenting, especially as new generations of scholars, each facing new academic and administrative pressures, came to the fore on both sides of the Atlantic. By making available in French the work of six historians already established in North America but not yet widely known in France, *HES* aimed not only to circulate the work of these scholars in a Francophone context but also to highlight for its audience the most recent problems and approaches in North American research on early modern France.

This forum can thus be best understood as the pendant to the *HES* special issue. Its purpose is to make the scholarship of a rising generation of French scholars better known to an Anglophone audience that, with the exception of specialists in specific subfields, has yet to encounter their work. It thus aims to provide a snapshot of current problems, approaches, and debates among this new generation of French *modernistes*. By translating the work of scholars who have published primarily (if not exclusively) in French, this forum seeks to

Michael P. Breen is associate professor of history and humanities at Reed College. He is author of *Law, City, and King: Legal Culture, Municipal Politics, and State Formation in Early Modern Dijon* (2007) and is working on a book tentatively titled *Law and Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.

<sup>1</sup> Michael P. Breen, ed., “Vu d’Amérique: L’histoire de la France moderne en Amérique du Nord,” special issue, *Histoire, économie, et société* 30, no. 2 (2011).

make some of the most interesting and innovative recent scholarship of young French early modernists available to an English-speaking audience and accessible for teaching purposes.

The articles in this forum provide a cross section and a sampling of scholarly currents in France today. Their fields of study range from the personal and intimate to the national and even international. At one end of the scale, Isabelle Luciani's careful, detailed analysis of Provençal *livres de raison* as artifacts provides new insights into processes of early modern self-formation. In so doing, it builds on a flourishing vein of research on *écrits du for privé* ("ego writings" or "self-writings") that has to date remained largely on the margins of English-language scholarship. In a similar vein, Claire Chatelain combines a literary analysis, along the lines pioneered by Christian Jouhaud, of the works of the seventeenth-century playwright Tristan L'Hermite with attentive use of notarial sources and family records, inspired by the work of Robert Descimon, to show how the children of noble families sought to navigate the particular psychological pressures and familial tensions resulting from the distinctive inheritance practices and family arrangements created by the so-called family-state compact of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Elie Haddad's study of kinship and the transmission of wealth and status among the Vassé family shifts our focus from the individual to the family, understood in patrilineal terms. Building on the work of Descimon and of anthropologists, Haddad shows how the transmission of goods, both real and symbolic, across generations continuously evolved in dialogue with broader social and economic changes, especially those concerning noble status and its acquisition or maintenance.

The last two articles in this collection turn our focus from the family to another enduring area of historical interest for this period: the relationship between religion and the state during the French Wars of Religion. Hugues Daussy's article grows out of a recent wave of renewed interest in the early years of the French Reformation and the initial phases of the Wars of Religion, so often overshadowed by the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the Catholic League, and the accession of Henri IV. Examining a diverse range of sources, from the well known to the long neglected, Daussy confronts fundamental questions that have long been overlooked: how did the Huguenots pay for their armies, and how could they afford to keep troops in the field long enough to fend off royal military efforts? Thierry Amalou's piece, meanwhile, takes us from the pragmatic financial concerns of Huguenot military leaders to Parisian preachers' invocations of prophetic authority to legitimize their increasingly strident criticisms of the monarchy during the Wars of Religion. Drawing on Denis Crouzet's approach to studying sym-

bolic and cultural meaning, Amalou shows how claims to the mantle of prophet invested theologically trained Parisian preachers with new kinds of spiritual authority, resulting in their own radicalization and that of the Parisian crowds they stirred with their teachings.

In the interest of continuing the scholarly debates and exchanges fostered by this forum and the earlier issue of *HES*, an H-France Salon will appear in conjunction with these articles. This Salon can be found at [www.h-france.net/Salon/h-francesalon.html](http://www.h-france.net/Salon/h-francesalon.html).