

*H-France Salon*  
Vol. 7 (2015), Issue #13, #9

### Concluding Remarks

Michael P. Breen  
Reed College

As the three essays that make up this issue of *H-France Salon* all make clear, collections of articles such as the *French Historical Studies* (henceforth FHS) forum on “Self, Family, Religion, and Society: New Directions in *l’histoire moderne* in France” present opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, they can provide a snapshot of current research trends and a chance to examine the questions, methods, and conclusions shaping the field (or at least a part of it). They also provide an opportunity to locate current work in a broader scholarly trajectory, as Jonathan Dewald has done, by enabling us to see links with past research projects and paradigms while also simultaneously identifying potential issues and questions for future scholars to pursue. Finally, collections like this one and its predecessor on North American scholarship on early modern France in *Histoire, économie, et société* (henceforth HES) (July 2011) can provide occasions for renewing and enhancing scholarly dialogue across national, linguistic, and academic boundaries. They can permit us to appreciate the extent to which the “interpenetration” of French and North American (and, more generally, Anglophone) scholarship on early modern France, as James Collins puts it, has created a remarkably unified, transnational community of scholars, while also showing how the different social, political, cultural, and institutional contexts that shape our everyday lives and professional activities still prompt us to pose different kinds of questions and foreground different types of research projects, as Penny Roberts has noted.

The big challenge with a collection such as this one, or indeed any collection, is, as Dewald notes, the “imperfect science” of sampling. No group of five articles could possibly begin to capture the “dazzling abundance” of the “wide range of topics” being addressed by young French *modernistes* today despite the many institutional, financial, and cultural challenges facing French historians today, many of which are all too familiar to their North American counterparts. As Collins rightly notes, there are many other excellent historians whose work might have been included here. The authors and topics included in the *FHS* forum are certainly not intended to be a sort of definitive list of the best new work being done in France today. However, to the extent that each of the authors works within a larger setting—be it the Friday morning seminar at the EHESS or a provincial research *laboratoire*—and engages with broader research projects and debates, these essays should convey something of the larger picture of “exuberant creativity” (as Dewald puts it) that continues to characterize research on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in France and hopefully spur further interest in it.

Another challenge, more specific to this particular collection, was the one the authors faced in working with the finite space allotted to the *SFH* forum. In order to include as many articles as possible, I asked contributors for pieces that were somewhat shorter than full-length articles but still, I believed, long enough to develop their core arguments. Indeed, I would like to thank the

contributors, as well as the translators, for their efforts in making these articles as concise as possible while preserving the core of their research and arguments. Several authors reworked their pieces more than once to fit within space limitations, and certainly all could have expanded their articles had space permitted.

As the purpose of the *FHS* forum was to familiarize the wider readership of *FHS* to the work of a new generation of French *modernistes*, I believe trading some depth for more breadth was justified. This was not without consequences, however. As Collins rightly observes, the authors of these articles are all quite familiar with Anglophone scholarship and engage with it in their research, even if this awareness is not always reflected here. The same can be said for the fact that these pieces might address larger issues and ideas at greater length, something that was not always possible given the constraints. Again, the hope is that these articles will provide an entrée into the larger bodies of work produced by these historians and their colleagues, where they develop their ideas and engage in historiographical and theoretical debates at greater length than they do in the limited realm of the *FHS* Forum.

In addition to balancing breadth and depth, I also sought to find the right mixture of coverage and coherence. On the one hand, it was important for the articles in the *FHS* forum to showcase a variety of topics, approaches, and intellectual traditions. At the same time, however, they needed to speak to each other in some way. As Penny Roberts notes, the subject matter of these articles emerges from two well-established streams of French scholarship. The first of these is a tradition of social history that has been interested in the family, the nobility, and changing mentalities and sensibilities. The second concerns the religious, political, and cultural histories of the late-sixteenth-century Wars of Religion, which profoundly shaped the era that followed. Clustering the articles around these two larger themes helped bring some of the elements that the *H-France Salon* essayists have highlighted to the fore. The influences of microhistory, the emphasis on the ways individual actions shape collective social structures, and the “mainly positive view” of an early modern period seen primarily through the lenses of literate urban elites that Dewald discusses emerged from authors’ individual articles rather than from any pre-ordained plan. The implications of these trends and others will hopefully inspire further debate and discussion.

The final challenge, and opportunity, was to organize the *FHS* forum so that it would work in tandem with the *HES* special issue on early modern French historians working in North America to highlight the complementary relationship between scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic. As Jim Collins notes, the “genuine interpenetration of research agendas and paradigms” that characterizes the field today can be traced back almost as far as the publication of David Pinkney’s famous article outlining the reasons why such a convergence was never likely to happen. But if the boundaries between French *modernistes* and their North American colleagues have been largely effaced, I would argue, the result has been to create not a single, unified republic of French early modernists but rather something resembling the Schengen area or the U.S. (and Canadian) federal systems—one where borders are easily and readily crossed but where local differences persist. We participate in each other’s seminars, take part in each other’s conferences and colloquia, and engage with each other’s research and writing. French scholars today, Collins notes, follow Anglophone research trends closely, and it is rare to find works by French scholars that fail to cite at least the major works of English language scholarship. Yet as Roberts aptly notes, something does change in translation.

We can see this clearly, I think, in Isabelle Luciani's fine article on *livres de raison*. The *H-France Salon*'s contributors aptly describe her essay's genealogy in microhistory and the history of *mentalités*. They also point out the ways in which her analysis could be developed further by engaging with Julie Hardwick's recent work on debt and recordkeeping (an article from which was published, ironically enough, in the *HES* special issue), the developing historiography of emotions, and even issues of gender.[1] In turn, however, it should be noted that Luciani clearly situates her work in the context of an active and dynamic field on "les écrits du for privé" (roughly translated as "ego-writings"), the questions and paradigms of which have not received broad exposure in the Anglophone world.[2] Both sides, it seems to me, have much to learn from the other here.

Another way we can see this process of translation at work is in certain French historians' appropriation and reworking of Sarah Hanley's well-known concept of the "Family-State Compact." Even as Hanley's model has come under scrutiny by many North American and Anglophone scholars, it has provided a useful way for Haddad, Chatelain, and others to reexamine the relations between individuals and their families and between families and the larger social and political networks that surround them. Ironically, the different approach to gender observed by all of the *H-France Salon* essayists might help to explain why our French colleagues have tended to sidestep the critiques made by Hardwick, Matthew Gerber, Lyndan Warner, and others and to focus instead on Hanley's insights about the interlocking relationships between venality, state formation, and family formation and reproduction in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[3] Descimon and Haddad's edited collection, *Épreuves de noblesse. Les expériences nobiliaires de la robe parisienne (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, which includes an article by Chatelain, provides what may be the most compelling support for Hanley's thesis to date, at least at it pertains to the Parisian robe.[4] Its richly-detailed studies drawn from careful scrutiny of notarial, familial, and other archives demonstrate convincingly how marriage arrangements, legal practices, and familial relationships changed as venal office holding became so central to individual and familial strategies for social advancement and wealth accumulation.

In the end, no collection of five articles can begin to capture the full range of scholarly production by the rising generation of French early modernists. Collins, for instance, rightly singles out Marie Houlemare's excellent work on the sixteenth-century Parlement of Paris as one example of this work, and indeed, there is a vibrant, active vein of scholarship on the parlements and other institutions of the Old Regime state in Paris and the provinces that is not reflected in the *FHS* forum.[5] The same could be said for the excellent work being done, often under the auspices of Michel Cassan, previously at the University of Limoges (who was Haddad's thesis director), on the "officiers moyens"—those who held non-ennobling judicial and fiscal offices in lesser bodies such as the *présidiaux* or *élections* and whose financial and familial fortunes often suffered greatly at the hands of the royal administration.[6] There are also the studies of local justice that are calling into question the notion that the Old Regime legal system was slow, costly, and hopelessly corrupt and inept.[7] As Penny Roberts points out, French scholars are also turning to topics, such as the Atlantic world and gender, that have tended to be of greater interest to their North American counterparts. Certainly, there are many routes to take and many currents to follow when it comes to the field of early modern history in France today. If the essays in the *FHS* forum in some way represent the "calm waters" of the field, it is with the

hope that they entice the readers of *FHS*, in particular those who are not *seiziemistes* and *dix-septiemistes*, to get their feet wet and explore the many exciting developments taking place among their *modernistes* colleagues on the other side of the ocean.

#### Notes

[1] Julie Hardwick, “Banqueroute: la faillite, le crime et la transition vers le capitalisme dans la France moderne,” *Histoire, économie, et société* 30:2 (2011): 79-94.

[2] For an overview, see the website of the research group on “Les écrits du for privé de la fin du Moyen-Âge à 1914,” accessed October 17, 2015, <http://ecritsduforprive.humanum.fr/publications.htm>.

[3] Hanley has developed her model of the “Family-State Compact” in a series of articles, including: “Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France,” *French Historical Studies* 16 (1989): 1-27; “Social Sites of Political Practice in France: Lawsuits, Civil Rights, and the Separation of Powers in Domestic and State Government, 1500-1800,” *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 27-52; “The Jurisprudence of the *Arrêts*: Marital Union, Civil Society, and State Formation in France, 1550-1650,” *Law and History Review* 21 (2003): 1-40; and “The Family, the State, and the Law in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Ideology of Male Right versus an Early Theory of Natural Rights,” *Journal of Modern History* 78 (2006): 289-332. Among recent studies that have criticized aspects of Hanley’s model are Julie Hardwick, *Family Business: Litigation and the Political Economies of Daily Life in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. pp. 118-21; Matthew Gerber, *Bastards: Politics, Family, and Law in Old Regime France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 13-18; Lyndan Warner, *The Ideas of Man and Woman in Renaissance France: Print, Rhetoric, and Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), esp. pp. 216-20. See also Janine Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), esp. pp. 37-39; Zöe A. Schneider, “Women Before the Bench: Female Litigants in Early Modern Normandy,” *French Historical Studies* 23 (2000): 1-32; and Christopher Corley, “Gender, Kin, and Guardianship in Early Modern Burgundy,” in Suzanne Desan and Jeffrey Merrick, eds., *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009): 183-222.

[4] Robert Descimon and Elie Haddad, eds., *Épreuves de noblesse. Les expériences nobiliaires de la robe parisienne (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010).

[5] In addition to Houllé’s book cited in Collins’s essay, see, for instance, Caroline Le Mao, *Parlement et parlementaires. Bordeaux au Grand Siècle* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2007) and the many collected acts of colloquia on the subject, including Gauthier Aubert and Olivier Chaline, eds., *Les parlements de Louis XIV. Opposition, coopération, autonomisation?* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010); Caroline Le Mao, *Hommes et gens du roi dans les parlements de France à l’époque moderne* (Pessac: Maison des sciences de l’homme d’Aquitaine, 2011); and Serge Dauchy, Véronique Demars-Sion, Hervé Leuwers, and Sabrina Michel, eds., *Les parlementaires, acteurs de la vie provinciale* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013). Other examples include Marie-Laure Legay and Katia Béguin’s recent works on public finance,

Christophe Blanquie's detailed studies of the kingdom's presidial courts, and Jérôme Loyseau's recent book on the nobility of the Estates of Burgundy.

[6] Michel Cassan, ed., *Offices et officiers «moyens» en France à l'époque moderne. Profession, culture* (Limoges: PULIM, 2004); and Vincent Meyzie, *Les Illusions perdues de la magistrature seconde. Les officiers "moyens" de justice en Limousin et en Périgord, vers 1665-Vers 1810* (Limoges: PULIM, 2006).

[7] Hervé Piant, *Une justice ordinaire. Justice civile et criminelle dans la Prévôté royale de Vaucouleurs sous l'ancien régime* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006); Fabrice Mauclair, *La Justice au village. Justice seigneuriale et société rurale dans le duché-pairie de La Vallière, 1667-1790* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008); and Frédéric Chauvaud, Yves Jean, and Laurent Willemez, eds., *Justice et sociétés rurales du XVIe siècle à nos jours* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011).

Michael P. Breen  
Reed College  
[breenm@reed.edu](mailto:breenm@reed.edu)

Copyright © 2015 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

*H-France Salon*  
Vol. 7 (2015), Issue #13, #9