

## Leonarde's Ghost

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# Leonarde's Ghost



Popular Piety and  
“The Appearance of a Spirit”  
in 1628

Translated with  
Introduction & Annotations  
Kathryn A. Edwards  
Susie Speakman Sutch

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by Albert de Saint-Jacques (also known as Christophe Mercier).

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## Acknowledgments

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We would like to thank Mlle. Danielle Ducout, past director of Dole's municipal library, and her staff for their assistance in checking Dusilet's copy of Mercier's manuscript, providing microfilms, and finding other contemporary materials. The municipal archive was equally helpful, providing volumes of materials on short order. This project has also benefited from the support of various North American institutions. The History Department of the University of Southern Mississippi generously granted a year's leave, which was spent at the University of Utah as an Eccles Research Fellow of the Tanner Humanities Center where this translation was begun, while the Folger Shakespeare Library provided a congenial and stimulating setting to complete this book and begin more comprehensive research on early modern ghosts and apparitions. The National Endowment of the Humanities, American Historical Association, Fulbright-Hayes Commission, Institut Français de Washington, and the University of South Carolina all provided additional funds for research in Dole, Belgium, and the Franche-Comté.

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## Foreword

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# The Editorial Process

The manuscript containing Huguette's story is housed today in Dole's main municipal library. It remains largely unknown, its binding giving no sense of its contents. A small book, it is sandwiched between large legal tomes from the early modern period. A brief note in the Dole library catalog lists the manuscript as "The History of the Appearance of a Spirit Which Happened in the City of Dole" and dates it to the early eighteenth century, despite repeated textual and material evidence that places the manuscript several decades earlier. While other contemporary printed books and bound manuscripts merited further description in the same catalog, no such detail is provided for Huguette's story. The inside of the front cover (the pastedown) attributes "The History" to Christophe Mercier, who was more commonly known by the name he took when professing as a Discalced Carmelite, Albert de St. Jacques. Mercier's voice is clearly discernible in the story as he comments on events he narrates and at times speaks directly to the reader. According to this same note, the surviving manuscript is itself not the original but a copy of Mercier's original manuscript. This copy was made later in the seventeenth century by Leonel Dusilet, dean of Neublans and member of Dole's college of canons. But the manuscript's mysteries do not end there. Within "The History," there are repeated references to what "I" saw, what "I" felt, and what "I" believed. The "I" belongs to a third author peeking out from the manuscript, namely, Huguette Roy herself.

These intricacies were among the many aspects of Huguette's story

that intrigued us as editors and translators. Aside from the insights the manuscript gives into early modern society, as outlined at the beginning of this book's introduction, "The History of the Appearance of a Spirit" is also a fascinating study of the ways people wrote who are not part of the canon of literary greats more commonly taught. The manuscript's French is rough and the author makes grammatical mistakes, but his style of writing, its tone, and even its flaws are consummately those of an author with middling abilities from the early modern Franche-Comté. In other words, whether the author was Mercier or Dusilet, he wrote in a style shared by many more people from his time than the literary luminaries so often presented as representative. Given that the manuscript combined these qualities with those of an appealing and illuminating story, we believed it would be ideal to present to both a general audience and readers with more specialized interests.

We were also convinced that the original story and the ways of thinking conveyed and formed by language could here best be appreciated through a translation that presented them as close to their original style, grammar, and pace as possible. By providing modern readers with a text that preserves much of the vitality and, at times, unevenness of the original French, we hope to impart some glimmer of what it was like to speak and think like a person from the Franche-Comté in the seventeenth century, to reinforce that sense of familiarity and difference that often attracts people to the study of history. Because we approached the text with such distinct editorial ideas in mind, we have provided here a sketch of the decisions they led us to make when translating and editing this manuscript.<sup>1</sup>

When preparing "The History" for publication, we were presented with many of the same circumstances faced by anyone working with early modern French texts and, in some cases, early modern texts more generally. By and large the manuscript is written in relatively clear, educated handwriting, but certain misreadings or mistranscriptions of Mercier's original have crept in and have required correction.<sup>2</sup> As was typical in the period, the spelling of proper names and uncommon words is phonetic, which means that one person's name may be spelled differently in differ-

<sup>1</sup>For more technical details about how the manuscript was edited and translated, see "Notes on Translation" available at <http://tsup.truman.edu>. Also available on this website is our French-language transcription of "The History" with footnotes clarifying specific editorial decisions.

<sup>2</sup>Delsalle, *Lexique pour l'étude de la Franche-Comté à l'époque des Habsbourg*; and Duchet-Suchaux and Duchet-Suchaux, *Dictionnaire du français régional de Franche-Comté*.

ent parts of the text. Huguette's neighbor Jeanne Massey had her last name written three ways. Huguette's own last name, "Roy," also appears as "Roye," and it is almost impossible to decide exactly how many *s*'s belong in the name of Jacques Deniset, one of Huguette's hosts while she was on pilgrimage. Since French punctuation did not yet follow set rules, sentences within the original text appear extraordinarily long and complex; at times a reader has to wonder if the speakers ever paused for breath. Personal pronouns, too, are used inconsistently when referring to the spirit: is it a she, a he, or an it? Sudden shifts in verb tenses, the complete omission of the subject pronoun where modern French requires one, and the disagreement of subject and verb or the gender of adjectives with the nouns that they modify are all among the many incongruities the manuscript presents to a reader, although these complexities are not unique to it, as any reader of early modern French legal or ecclesiastical records can attest.

In addition to the usual complications that arise because of linguistic differences between French and English, we were also faced with translation decisions that could affect the fundamental meaning of the text in unusual ways. In "The History," the ghost takes almost a month—that is, half the manuscript—to reveal its spiritual status, and the extent to which the spirit is human is fundamental in determining its legitimacy and Huguette's orthodoxy. As such, it matters whether the author believes the spirit to be male (he), female (she), or neuter (it). Our author treats the spirit's gender in such a way as to reinforce its orthodoxy while retaining the narrative drama of the story. In English, where the words for ghost and spirit have no gender, that aspect of the story's construction can easily be lost.

As the above example of gendering a ghost suggests, our author also had more idiosyncratic concerns, and these peculiarities are reflected in his writing. For instance, he uses Latin language structures that can make his meaning difficult to grasp, and he is often mistaken when he quotes or paraphrases Latin texts. He repeatedly changes voice in the narration—from "I" to "we" and again to the third person, all in the same paragraph—a practice that could indicate either undisciplined or uneducated writing or as is more likely, given Mercier's and Dusilet's background, an extremely close identification with the people and events presented in "The History." The vividness of the author's experience is reflected in the vividness of his language. He presents characters as having real personalities and depicts emotional states such as reverence, awe, cynicism, anger, and frustration in

dialogue and description as befits not merely the experiences they are undergoing, but their social and educational level as well. These qualities do not prevent and may even have fostered the development of textual inaccuracies. He misidentifies regional cults of the Virgin Mary and the locations of distant villages. Mercier also has difficulties keeping track of the apparition's schedule. In chapter 1, he notes that the spirit arrived at different times each day, while in chapter 3 he mentions that the spirit's hour "is approaching," implying that it followed a predictable schedule. Repeating the same pattern, in chapter 11 Mercier writes about the spirit's regular twice-a-day visits, whereas earlier in the text the spirit has only been appearing once a day.

Given the challenges these inconsistencies posed and our reasons for presenting "The History" to a modern, English-language audience, our translation enterprise has been governed by two seemingly contradictory principles: clarity of the English text and fidelity to the French original. Yet these two fundamentals were not as mutually exclusive as they may seem. Throughout our translation, we have endeavored to produce an English text that is intelligible while remaining faithful to the seventeenth-century French of the original. Where these two principles collided, we chose to focus on clarity. We have also tried, as far as possible, to preserve the liveliness and spontaneity of the original French by respecting its syntax, inconsistencies of verb tense, and tendency to structure sentences out of strings of participial phrases and clauses. We have attempted to keep punctuation to a minimum, as in the original French text, but have added it when necessary to promote readability and clarity.

When dealing with a manuscript copy, editors are bound to come across misreadings and mistranscriptions. "The History" is no exception. Where we have discerned a blatant misreading, lapse, or mistranscription in the manuscript Dusilet produced, the demands of clarity have again prevailed. In such cases, and they are minimal, we have relied on our correction when we translated the text into English rather than introduce more confusion by retaining Dusilet's misreading and correcting it in footnotes to the translation. We also have made some clarifications to the original pronouns or nouns, most commonly adding a proper noun or a verb. We have cut some of the use of the conjunction "and" in favor of briefer and more intelligible sentences, and on very rare occasions we have converted a string of participial clauses into independent clauses. Finally, we have introduced contractions into certain segments of dialogue in order to

approximate the liveliness of direct speech. Huguette and Leonarde argue with the speed and slurring common in family quarrels, and their dialogue should reflect their passion.

Despite our best efforts, there remain elements that will be jarring to the English reader: the ambiguous personal references, the mountains of adverbs and adjectives, the use of past and future tenses to describe the same events, and the sentences that can extend for several manuscript pages. By minimizing new punctuation, insertion of words and phrases, and division of sentences except when absolutely necessary for clarity, we have presented a language that can seem quite odd at times to a modern English reader, such as the enormous sentence at the end of chapter 13. Such sentences, though, also give a modern audience a more immediate sense of how the manuscript actually reads and the way readers over the centuries could draw diverse conclusions from, in part, this linguistic imprecision. It is a vagueness that Mercier, Huguette, and Leonarde could exploit. For similar reasons, we have also avoided regularizing verb tenses, which can make following the story somewhat exciting as Mercier switches tenses with abandon. The translation's roughness reflects the roughness, vitality, rhythms, and ambiguities of the original manuscript, further illustrating the complexities in any language's evolution. For us, the "ugliness" of Mercier's French, to paraphrase a frequent complaint we made at the beginning of the project, has become yet another way "The History" offers insight into ugliness and beauty, the mundane and the wonderful in the lives of early modern Europeans.

## Introduction

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# A Setting for a Ghost Story



On 7 April 1628, a spirit visited a poor, pregnant woman in the city of Dole, the capital of the Franche-Comté, a province in the far west of the Holy Roman Empire. This apparition was dressed in white but appeared to be a young chambermaid, someone the woman could ill afford to hire. For over fifty days, it spoke to the woman, cared for her and her newborn son, and demonstrated its good nature to almost everyone it encountered. Although the spirit came to aid Huguette Roy, the young mother, over time it revealed that it too needed help. It was a suffering soul desperate to escape purgatory. Many people in Dole were both curious about and frightened of the ghost. A young man named Christophe Mercier left a record of their experiences, including the impressions he gained from being in the room with the spirit. When Mercier wrote the history of Huguette Roy and the spirit who visited her, Leonarde Colin, he may have seen his work as having many purposes: to glorify God, to teach orthodox piety, and to exonerate both Huguette and Leonarde, among others. Although his success in most of these goals remains unknowable, he apparently accomplished the latter. Huguette was never prosecuted or even roughly questioned, unlike so many women in the early seventeenth century who claimed to see or hear spirits.

If, however, he intended to establish a cult around Leonarde or glorify the town in which a blessed soul appeared, he was less successful. The original manuscript has disappeared, and the town council's minutes and the records of the region's religious houses make no mention of Huguette

or Leonarde after the time of this story. There are no relics, no pious broadsheets, and no devotions. Although Mercier's manuscript was copied, bound in leather, and eventually placed in Dole's burgeoning municipal library, their story seems to have merited no more than an antiquarian's interest. In the studies of local piety during the seventeenth century scattered throughout regional journals, they are only mentioned sporadically, as a historical oddity. Their most recent claim to fame was a brief article during the 1980s in the local paper, *Les Dépêches*, although the picture of the building in which Huguette lived and which has survived, albeit highly renovated, took as much space as the copy itself.

Despite this neglect, Huguette and Leonarde's story has much to offer. Mercier's account provides an approachable entrance into a region rarely treated in English-language histories, even though the kings of France and the Holy Roman emperors felt it was important enough to fight over it for centuries. More importantly, however, it opens a rare window into the spirituality, piety, and daily lives of "ordinary" people in early modern Europe. While it does so through an extraordinary event—a ghostly apparition—it also emphasizes the mundane: the furniture in Huguette's home, connections within her neighborhood, and relationships between family members. Mercier's sympathy for Huguette molds his account, but her story avoids the constraints of accounts discovered in legal archives; Huguette is never directly placed in a situation where she is fighting for her life, and legal process does not direct those observing or questioning her. Given the timing of Leonarde's appearance, "The History" also testifies to the promotion and practice of Catholic reform in a region that had, increasingly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, come to define itself through its Catholicism. Huguette and Leonarde's history is thus a story integrating housework and holiness, gossip and theology, friendship and penance, centered around a young woman and a ghost on a social and spiritual journey. Huguette, Leonarde, Christophe, and their community experienced an extraordinary event, but it also was one to be expected and, if divinely instituted, embraced in early modern Catholicism.

In order to understand this mix of the ordinary and extraordinary, it is necessary to understand the setting of the story: the free county (Franche-Comté) of Burgundy and, in particular, the county's capital, Dole, where Huguette lived and the story's events occurred. Much of this town and region's history is available only in French, so much of the local context may

be unfamiliar to many readers. Rather than providing an introduction that neatly integrates Huguette's haunting into the society of the early modern France-Comté, we have separated the original source and the historical context. This division allows readers to focus more readily on specific topics in the introduction, using the information as a foundation for their own analysis without being told how to interpret the text. We hope that our way of organizing the information will permit readers to draw independent conclusions using varied techniques of historical and literary analysis and to appreciate more immediately the fear associated with the appearance of a ghost and the wonder of this early modern ghost story.

## CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

Some of the people and events in this manuscript can be found in other contemporary records. Huguette Roy and her husband, Antoine Roget, lived in Dole during the first half of the seventeenth century. They had a total of five children: two girls and three boys. The birth of the middle child, Claude, prompted the haunting, and his record in the baptismal register corresponds to the date provided by Mercier.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a month after Leonarde's first apparition, the Dole town council sent two members of the council to check on the disturbances occurring on the street where Huguette lived. There are no accounts of urban unrest during May 1628; thus it is plausible that their visit was because of Leonarde's apparitions, which were attracting quite a crowd by that stage.

There are also supporting documents from the decades following the haunting. A Claude Roget survived childhood and lived in Dole during the mid-seventeenth century. He may have even joined the Discalced Carmelite friars, one of the reformed religious orders for which Mercier suggests Claude will have a special affinity. Evidence of Claude's extraordinary infancy is corroborated in a letter from 1641 by Jean Boyvin, mayor of Dole and member of the city's chief legal body, the Parlement, to a colleague and

<sup>1</sup>Archives municipales de Dole [hereafter AMDole], GG12, fol. 218. Before Claude's birth, they had two daughters, Carola and Marguerita, baptized on 25 July 1625 and 3 April 1627, respectively; AMDole, GG9. After Claude's birth, they would have two more sons: Antoine, who was baptized on 1 November 1630, and Nicolas, who was baptized on 8 Oct. 1634; AMDole, GG15, fols. 83r & 185v. As was customary in this era, both of the sons had godparents of a higher social status than those of the daughters. Unfortunately the other baptismal and death registers were only kept sporadically in Dole for the first half of the seventeenth century, so we cannot confirm any additional births or deaths.

friend, Jean-Jacques Chifflet, living in the town of Besançon, located approximately thirty miles northeast of Dole. In this letter, Boyvin provides a summary whose outlines are essentially identical to those given in Mercier's account: a spirit troubled a young and naive woman, this spirit was eventually revealed to be a suffering soul, and the young woman and community rallied to provide what was necessary for the soul to ascend to heaven.<sup>2</sup> According to the letter, Boyvin gained his information directly from Father Orlando, a Jesuit at Dole, who was one of the Jesuits who helped guide Huguette and test the spirit; while none of the Jesuits' names is given in the text translated here, a Father Orlando was among Dole's Jesuits in the first half of the seventeenth century. Boyvin also delivers the sad news that Huguette died sometime before 1641 in one of the outbreaks of plague that swept through the Franche-Comté.

There are two other characters who are central to Huguette's story and for whom contemporary information exists: the text's authors, Christophe Mercier and Leonel Dusilet. Huguette, the woman who saw the spirit, did not herself compose the text translated here; if she had, it would be an even more extraordinary document than it is. Instead, the only surviving manuscript is attributed to Christophe Mercier, who implies that he was Huguette's confessor, although he may only be one of the many clergy observing events in Huguette's rooms. Mercier was a young man, probably in his twenties, at the time of the events recounted here, but he remained committed to visionary piety and to writing books throughout his life. In 1664 he composed a book in praise of the contemplative life called *La Sainte Solitude* (Holy Solitude), which also showed his awareness of Catholic reform movements in the Low Countries. In 1673 he wrote *La vie de la venerable mère Tèrese de Iesus fondatrice des Carmelites de la Franche-Comté de Bourgogne* (The Life of the Venerable Mother Theresa of Jesus, founder of the Carmelites of the Franche-Comté of Burgundy); two years later he published a French translation of a Spanish book listing the visions of purgatorial souls experienced by a Discalced Carmelite sister.<sup>3</sup> Each of these works marks him as a participant in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Catholic reformed movements epitomized in the lives of Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Claude, in fact, joined the Discalced Carmelites, took the name of Albert de St. Jacques, and became the head

<sup>2</sup>Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon [hereafter BMB], Collection Chifflet, ms. 103, 3 June 1641, fols. 146r–47r.

<sup>3</sup>Albert de St. Jacques, trans., *Lumiere aux vivans par l'experience des morts*.

(provincial) of the Burgundian province of that order. As such, he administered communities of Discalced Carmelites throughout the Franche-Comté; as a Discalced Carmelite himself, he presumably practiced the intense, contemplative, and somewhat reclusive piety for which the male branch was known. As the provincial, it is also likely that he traveled to the Low Countries and possibly even Spain or Italy for meetings. Certainly he participated in theological and literary exchanges between those regions. While there is no evidence that he attended the university at Dole, it is highly unlikely that someone attaining his prominence in the Discalced Carmelite friars would have had no advanced education, and his writings testify to some specialized theological training. The remaining records for the Franche-Comté's Discalced Carmelite friars are quite sparse, so nothing is known about his other activities. Although there is no surviving contemporary record of his death, eighteenth-century accounts note Albert de St. Jacques as having died in 1680.

The extant manuscript about Huguette's haunting was, however, copied by someone else, albeit someone who may have been well acquainted with Mercier. According to a short note on its inside front cover, "The History" that has come down to us is a copy of Mercier's original manuscript made by Leonel Dusilet, dean of Neublans and member of Dole's college of canons. Dole's registers attest to the activities of a Leonard Dusilet in the late seventeenth century, and given the family's genealogy, the linguistic similarities of the names, and the concurrence between the dating of the manuscript and Leonard's clerical activities, it is likely that Leonard and Leonel are the same man. Leonard himself may have experienced the events Mercier described; he died in late 1697 at the venerable age of eighty-eight.<sup>4</sup> As dean of Neublans, Dusilet was a member of the religious community in Dole charged with ministering to the city's residents, the college of canons attached to Our Lady (Notre Dame) of Dole. It appears that Dusilet lived in Dole, unlike some of the other canons, and so may even have known Mercier. Records of the college attest that he regularly attended meetings of that community in the second half of the seventeenth century, although he stopped coming several years before his death.<sup>5</sup> Although the Dusilet family would gain some regional prominence in the

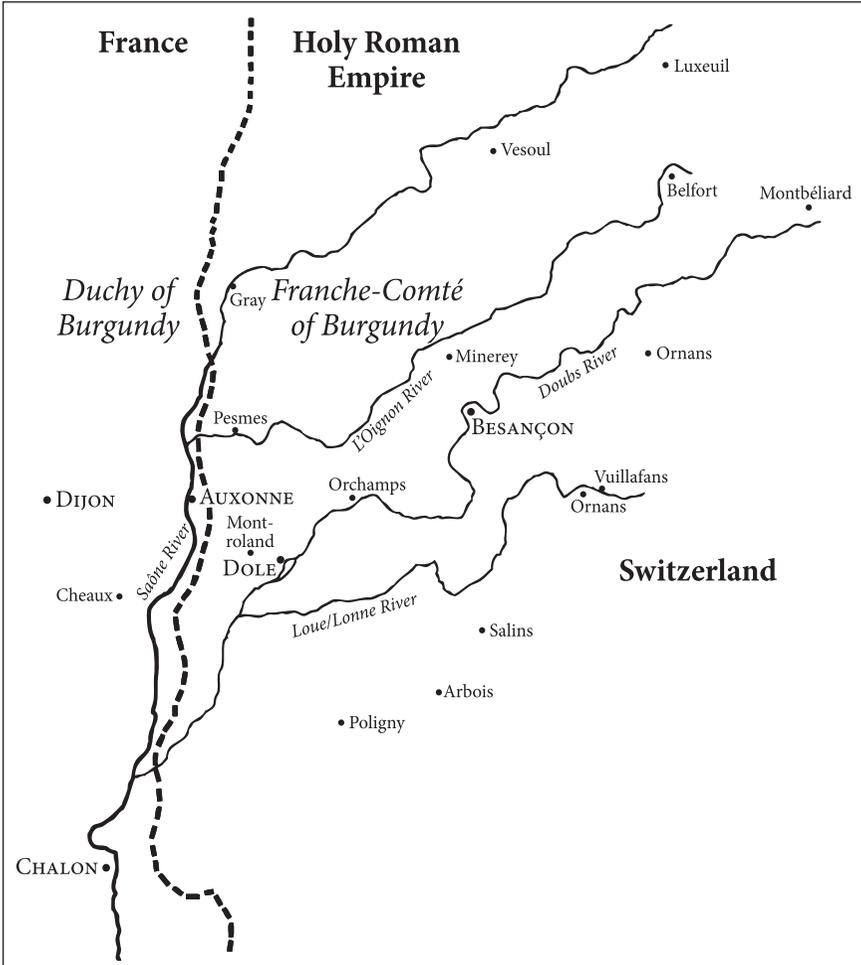
<sup>4</sup>AMDole, GG54, fol. 5r. The chances that Dusilet was the author of this story are, however, slight. A comparison of linguistic structures between this manuscript and those books composed by Albert de St. Jacques shows striking similarities in syntax, vocabulary, and tone.

<sup>5</sup>Archives départementales du Jura [hereafter ADJ], G96.

eighteenth century, in the seventeenth it still only enjoyed middling status—enough to have a son appointed a canon but not enough for richer appointments or further clerical advancement. As with Mercier, however, little remains to trace Dusilet’s career and even less exists to assess his beliefs. Because of these circumstances, the “history” Mercier and Dusilet have prepared is not only the best account of the lives of Huguette, her family, and friends, but it is the best testament available of the spiritual commitments and concerns of two prominent clerics in the Franche-Comté during the height of its Catholic reform.

### HUGUETTE’S HOME: THE CITY OF DOLE AND ITS REGION

Nestled in the rolling foothills that mark the beginning of the Jura mountains, Dole in the early twenty-first century is a market town, local administrative seat, and popular vacation spot for those seeking peace and quiet. To the west lie the flat, fertile plains of the Côte d’Or (the gold coast) with its fields of wheat and mustard; its prosperous villages testify to the appropriateness of its name. To the east of Dole the foothills build, eventually becoming the fortified peaks and rocky gorges that separate the county of Burgundy (Franche-Comté), to which Dole belongs, from the Swiss Confederation. From all directions, small hamlets and farming villages mark the approach to Dole, and it is often difficult to tell where these communities end and the suburbs of Dole begin. On the city’s periphery and in neighboring villages, horses graze and gardens thrive in the large backyards that give the area a decidedly rural flavor. To the south of Dole, however, the river Doubs provides a striking division between these rural suburbs and the city itself. Bordered by the river and roads built where the city’s walls once stood, the center of Dole retains its early modern character and only takes about fifteen minutes to walk across. Most of its buildings date from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, and the winding streets they line make driving anything other than a compact car a challenge. The church of Our Lady dominates Dole’s skyline, and on Saturday mornings the square in front of it hosts an open-air market that overflows onto the neighboring streets and sidewalks. Religious houses, such as those of the Jesuits and Franciscans, are located in this center as well and reflect the same aesthetic tastes as the many prosperous town houses on the major thoroughfares. Dole’s organization and architecture, as well as road names such as rue du Gouvernement (Government Street),



The Dole Region and Key Cities of the Franche-Comté. Map by Kathryn A. Edwards.

bear witness to its historical stature.

Much of this now picturesque landscape had just been or was being constructed at the time of the story translated here (1628) and represents a rebuilding and expansion of Dole's previous infrastructure after more than a century's turmoil.<sup>6</sup> This history, particularly the repeated threats Dole faced from France and challenges to the oligarchy's authority by rival town councils, remained immediate to Dole's secular and ecclesiastical leaders.

<sup>6</sup>The most recent synthesis of the county's history is Walter, *Histoire de la Franche-Comté*.

## About the Editors

KATHRYN A. EDWARDS received her PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. She is associate professor of history at the University of South Carolina. She is the author of *Families and Frontiers: Re-creating Communities and Boundaries in the Early Modern Burgundies* (2002) and editor of *Werewolves, Witches, and Wandering Spirits: Folklore and Traditional Belief in Early Modern Europe* (2002). Her current research focuses on early modern European beliefs about ghosts.

SUSIE SPEAKMAN SUTCH received her PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. She is a postdoctoral research fellow at Ghent University. Her research focuses on late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century literature and civic culture in the southern Low Countries.