

## Call for papers

### From America to France Beaumarchais and the experience of Revolution

October 1–4, 2026  
Grenoble & Vizille (France)

International symposium

Organizing committee : Université Grenoble Alpes (Gilles Montègre)  
Musée de la Révolution française – Domaine de Vizille (Sophie Mouton)  
Université Paul-Valéry de Montpellier (Linda Gil)



In 2026, as the United States celebrates 250 years of independence and takes an increasingly aggressive stance toward Europe, the Museum of the French Revolution – Domaine de Vizille and the LUHCIE laboratory at Grenoble Alpes University are organizing an international symposium aimed at rethinking the revolutionary origins of Franco-American relations through the figure and writings of Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732-1799). This reinterpretation has been made possible by the recent acquisition by the Bibliothèque nationale de France of Beaumarchais' voluminous personal archives, as well as by the unprecedented digital publication of his entire surviving correspondence and manuscripts, undertaken as part of the collective and interdisciplinary program @rchibea (2024-2029).

Danton, Napoleon, and many others believed they detected a prophetic foreshadowing of the French Revolution in Beaumarchais's theatrical work. But the author of *The Marriage of Figaro* did not become famous solely for the diatribes against privilege uttered by his Seville barber. It is now often forgotten, but Beaumarchais was also an observer and actor in the Atlantic revolutions, whose success he constantly predicted even as he sought to determine their course. As soon as the American insurgents entered into open rebellion against Great Britain, Beaumarchais set out to convince France's King Louis XVI to seek an alliance with Americans, whom he described as "full of enthusiasm for liberty". He argued that "such a nation must be invincible" (letter to the king, September 21, 1775). After living through the French Revolution, in a context in which Franco-American relations had become dangerously strained, Beaumarchais wrote to one of the leaders of France's ruling Directory that he dreamed only of "rapprochement between the two greatest republics in the world, the French and the American" (letter to Jean-François Reubell, June 7, 1798). This steady confidence in the necessary union of the two sides of the North Atlantic will be examined during the conference in light of the new approaches that characterize revolutionary historiography today.

The first of these new approaches centers on the transnational connections and reciprocal influences that characterized the revolutionary experience in the second half of the 18th century. Although Beaumarchais himself never set foot in America, the extent of his transatlantic networks, now well documented by the dense and continuous series of letters he wrote, provides a particularly stimulating framework for rethinking the links between the American and French revolutions. These links can be measured first and foremost by Beaumarchais' role in supplying both young republics with weapons and military equipment. The company known as Roderigue & Hortalez, secretly run by Beaumarchais, did not merely connect the French monarchy with the American insurgents; well before the Franco-American alliance of 1778, it paved the way for the first military victories won by George Washington's Continental Army and reinforced connections between ports cities on both sides of the North Atlantic, as well as several in the Caribbean and Spanish America. As for the later "affaire des fusils de Hollande" in which Beaumarchais became involved during the French Revolution, it deserves to be revisited from the perspective of the internationalization of revolutions across continental Europe. Beaumarchais attempted to supply revolutionary France with rifles from the Brabant Revolution, not long before France itself attempted to establish a Batavian republic in the United Provinces. Through transnational practices such as these that were typical of the age of revolutions, Beaumarchais' networks provides a basis on which we can question models both of hegemony and balance of power among major world powers. Whether colonial or emancipatory, slave-owning or liberating, these models must be examined from an economic as well as a political perspective, and from a financial as well as a cultural perspective, using archives that shed light on them from a practical rather than simply a theoretical point of view.

The second approach that will guide the symposium's discussions draws on new ways of understanding the history of emotions, which historians no longer regard as mere reactions to revolutionary events but as active performative factors in them. The emotional experience of freedom that breathes through Beaumarchais's writings will be reconsidered in light of his personal experience of the American and French revolutions, which was both enthusiastic and painful. A sumptuous residence he built in 1787 in the shadow of the Bastille was searched and requisitioned on numerous occasions during significant moments of the Revolution. His *Compte rendu des neuf mois les plus pénibles de ma vie* (Account of the Nine Most Painful Months of My Life) published in 1793 at the time of the establishment of the Comité de Salut Public, also deserves to be revisited with a fresh eye, and to be compared with the *Mémoires contre Goëzman* (Memoirs Against Goëzman), which first established Beaumarchais's fame during the Enlightenment. Many others of his published writings still need to be read in light of the newly available manuscripts and archival documents. In plays such as *La Mère coupable*, operas such as *Tarare*, but also in printed legal briefs, public letters, and articles published in the periodical *Courrier de l'Europe*, Beaumarchais multiplied the forms of communication that inked politics to the emotional sphere: in this way, he helped to respond to the crisis of representation that can be considered one of the main drivers of the revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic.

Proposals for papers of approximately one page (in English or French) should be sent to Gilles Montègre ([gilles.montegre@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:gilles.montegre@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr)) and Linda Gil ([linda.gil@univ-montp3.fr](mailto:linda.gil@univ-montp3.fr)) before **April 30, 2026**. Presentations based on original documentation from the BnF collections (<https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc1256467/cb3485>) as well as other American, European or French collections will be given priority. Speakers' expenses may be covered, and particular attention will be paid to the multidisciplinary nature of the papers, as well as to the balance between researchers from Europe and the United States.

#### Scientific Committee

**David Bell** (Princeton University) – **Philippe Bourdin** (Université Clermont Auvergne) – **Robert Darnton** (Harvard University) – **Vincenzo Ferrone** (Université de Turin) – **Linda Gil** (Université Paul-Valéry de Montpellier) – **Aurélien Lignereux** (Université Grenoble Alpes) – **Antoine Lilti** (Collège de France) – **Virginie Martin** (Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne) – **Gilles Montègre** (Université Grenoble Alpes) – **Stéphane Pujol** (Université de Toulouse) – **Bertrand Van Ruymbeke** (Université Paris 8) – **Charles-Eloi Vial** (Bibliothèque nationale de France) – **Virginie Yvernault** (Sorbonne Université)

#### The ANR @rchibea program: Beaumarchais in the digital age

Funded by the French National Research Agency, the @rchibea program (2024-2029) brings together four laboratories in Montpellier (IRCL), Grenoble (LUHCIE), Toulouse (PLH), and Sorbonne University (CELLF) around the last great author and actor of the Enlightenment, whose archives have not been the subject of a major scientific edition and study. With the support of an international and multidisciplinary team, @rchibea has set itself the goal of analyzing and digitally publishing all of Beaumarchais' letters and papers, which will be hosted on the Huma-Num platform in "open edition" to ensure access to as many researchers as possible.

## The Museum of the French Revolution – Vizille (France)



Located at the foot of the Alps, within the majestic Domaine de Vizille, the Museum of the French Revolution preserves and displays a collection of artworks and historical objects that are key references points both for the revolutionary decade and its resonance in subsequent centuries, in France and around the world. The museum offers visitors the opportunity to experience for themselves this seminal episode in France's history. Each year, this goal is supplemented by cultural programs accessible to as many people as possible. Our scientific symposium will be accompanied by a full weekend of events: guided tours, dramatized readings, movie nights, opera concerts, and more. Within the museum, the Albert Soboul Resource Center welcomes researchers interested in the Revolution throughout the year. The Museum of the French Revolution – Domaine de Vizille belongs to the network of eleven museums in the Department of Isère, which are free to all.

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