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**TORONTO RENAISSANCE AND
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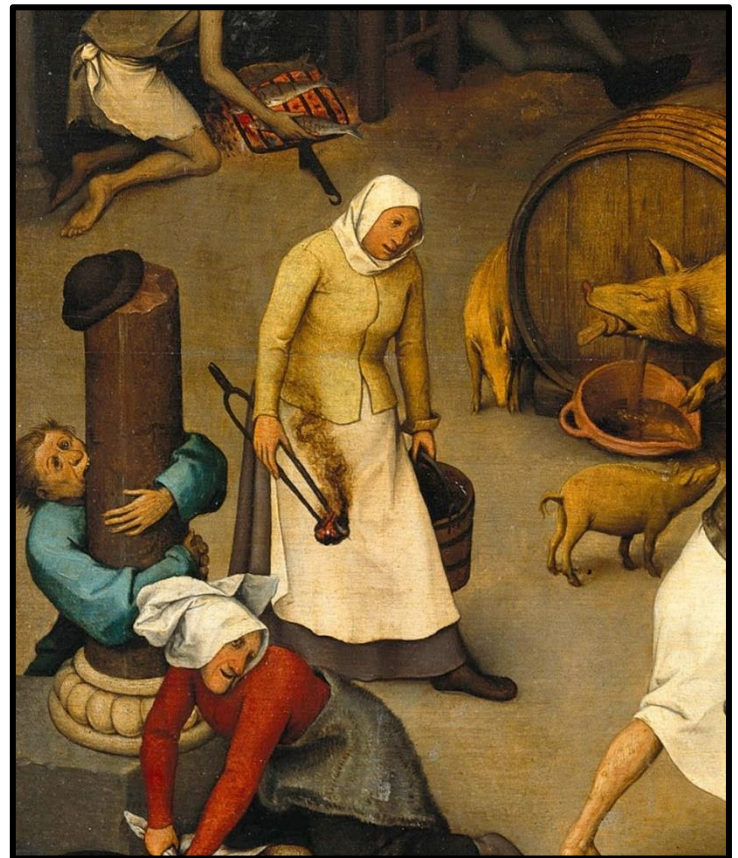


Daniel Jütte
(New York University)

**Pillar-Biters: Columnar Devotion as a Trope and Reality
in Early Modern Europe**

Friday, 4 March 2022, 2:00 p.m. (Toronto time) via Zoom. To attend this talk, please send email to Megan Armstrong at marmstr@mcmaster.ca and ask her to register you for the talk. One day before the event you will receive an email containing access information to the lecture.

A common motif in late medieval and early modern Northern European art is the “pillar-biter” – a man, or occasionally also a woman, biting into a column. The iconographic meaning has been established: the motif denoted religious hypocrisy and the dissimulation of piety. But why exactly did premodern Europeans associate religious hypocrisy with columns? This question leads into a larger (and largely unstudied) issue: an unease with columns that runs deep in the Christian tradition. The case of the pillar-biter motif can serve as a starting point for a broader discussion of this phenomenon. To the modern beholder, the column may seem a mere architectural element, but, as this talk argues, premodern viewers associated it with a host of religious and devotional practices that have since fallen into oblivion.



Daniel Jütte is Associate Professor of History at New York University. He is the author of *The Strait Gate: Thresholds and Power in Western History* (Yale University Press, 2015), as well as *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400–1800* (Yale University Press, 2015; first German ed. 2011). His current book project is titled *Transparency: The Material History of an Idea*.

Image: Detail from Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559). Gemäldegalerie Berlin. (Wikimedia Commons, public domain).