
This almost 700-page monograph based on Marie Houllemare’s doctoral thesis analyses speech as an active component of law making in the Parlement of Paris in the sixteenth century. Through the speeches, texts, rituals, and ceremonies of men of justice, Houllemare skilfully examines the linguistic, gestural, and performative rhetoric by which they established authority within the hierarchy of the institution as well as before the wider public, and negotiated with monarchs who held varied political and judicial ambitions for the institution.

The initial section analyses *parlement* as a space of socio-political regulation and dialogue whose legitimacy derived both from the manner in which it was used and a language of signs that was theatrical and procedural. Houllemare first explores how *parlement* established power and authority as a venue for the resolution of personal conflicts of *justiciables* able to manipulate the institutions’ complexities and the law’s conflicting civil jurisdictions. In Chapter 2, Houllemare examines the balance of authority between king and *parlement*, negotiated in discourse, gesture, and personal relationships. From tense relations with François I who used the *parlement* in largely symbolic ways to assert the supremacy of the monarchy, Houllemare reveals the efforts at reconciliation and partnership under Henri II for whom *parlement* played a crucial role in both judicial and religious reformations. Chapter 3 examines *parlement*’s creation of its own authority. Its lavish furnishings and location may have heightened its royal and religious connections but Houllemare also explores the significance of rituals of time, space, order, and ceremony that demarcated secret from more visible aspects of its work for a far wider public. The construction of institutional memory that reflected and shaped a shared mentality is the focus of Chapter 4. Houllemare highlights the key role of personnel, such as the *greffier*, as agents in a process of assimilation of oral texts to a unified written record which would become a powerful tool in building the *parlement*’s own narrative of its identity and purpose.

Section II turns towards the oratory arts and the men who were its leading practitioners, and through it we encounter the lives and works of individuals such as Anne Robert, Simon Marion, Étienne Pasquier, Christophe de Thou, and the Seguier dynasty. Houllemare begins by exploring the rhetorical skills developed in shared training, familial heritage, and close-knit patterns of *parlementaires*’ domestic life. Chapters 6 and 7 chart the shift from a technical, legal language to an oratory art that was wielded by a developing professional group who increasingly saw themselves as mediators between the people and the law. If the ideal that dominated the first half of the century was a rhetoric
of simplicity, sobriety, and a claimed neutrality reflecting an objective truth, through close examination of the archival and printed pleas of around twenty leading lawyers, Houllemare demonstrates a much more human reality of emotive persuasion, verbosity, and appeals to the vanity (and authority) of both judges and the institution. In the second half of the century, she detects a discernible humanist influence, tracing the presence of non-legal texts in parlementaires’ libraries, their reading and notation practices, and their sources of reference. Houllemare finally explores how parlement’s leading men seized new opportunities for expression within the institution as their speech left its confines and entered new domains in print, fashioning new identities for themselves and their colleagues as they did so.

In the final section, Houllemare analyses the potency of different models for the parlement conceptualised by its members. As a senate, parlement’s magistrates could position themselves as a recognised political force, guardians of the kingdom’s fundamental laws and interlocutors with the monarch. The model of the theatre instead emphasised oratory skills and the institution’s opportunities for gesture and ceremonies through which it interacted with a wider public and become a place for healing and exploration of contemporary feelings. The conceptualisation of parlement as a sacred temple by contrast drew from humanist and biblical ideas, and emerged with Henri II’s employment of the institution as an instrument of religious reform, creating in 1547 the Chambre ardente to pursue heresy trials. However, those disenfranchised by the vision of a purified, sacred, moral body found the vision of a forum more inclusive to their voices, which could function as a more politically open space to explore current affairs through cases that impacted wider national interests.

Ultimately, Houllemare argues how uneven and uncertain the rise of the monarchy over parlement appears when studied at such close quarters. This is an insightful cultural history of a key French institution of the period that has much to recommend it. Although it engages closely with a considerable volume of original archival and printed sources and primarily a secondary scholarship focused directly on parlement, particularly that created by a handful of key French scholars, readers will find that it offers rich pickings for more than political and legal historians alone.

Susan Broomhall, The University of Western Australia